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DESCRIPTION

Themelios is an international, evangelical, peer-reviewed theological journal that expounds and defends the historic Christian faith. Its primary audience is theological students and pastors, though scholars read it as well. Themelios began in 1975 and was operated by RTSF/UCCF in the UK, and it became a digital journal operated by The Gospel Coalition in 2008. The editorial team draws participants from across the globe as editors, essayists, and reviewers. *Themelios* is published three times a year online at The Gospel Coalition website in PDF and HTML, and may be purchased in digital format with Logos Bible Software and in print with Wipf and Stock.

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EDITORIAL

A Case for Education Today

— Brian J. Tabb —

Brian Tabb is president and professor of biblical studies at Bethlehem College and Seminary in Minneapolis and general editor of Themelios.

It is an honor to be installed as the third president of Bethlehem College and Seminary.[1] As an early graduate of The Bethlehem Institute and a longtime professor, I love this institution and am eager to lead us forward with God's help. Bethlehem College and Seminary equips men and women to treasure Christ above all things, to grow in wisdom and knowledge over a lifetime, and to glorify God in every sphere of life. Our Christian-hedonist, Classical, Great Commission-minded College aims to graduate mature men and women who are ready to witness for Christ with wisdom and wonder for the rest of their lives. Our Seminary prepares men to be mature, God-entranced pastors who will shepherd God's people with biblical clarity and Christ-exalting affection. We do all this to spread a passion for the supremacy of God in all things for the joy of all peoples through Jesus Christ.

In this inaugural address, I aim to offer a renewed case for the seminary today. Some analysts have announced "the ending of seminaries as we've known them."[2] Others have offered guidance to adapt to the changing educational landscape.[3] Notable seminaries have closed or contracted in recent years, and in the face of economic hardships, declining enrollments, and cultural pressures it's fair to wonder what sort of future seminary education has in the coming decades. Many schools have streamlined degree requirements and embraced online delivery options to offer students more flexibility in their theological training.[4] Some seminaries now offer an array of programs beyond the traditional Master of Divinity, including degrees in biblical counseling, apologetics, humanitarian action, Christian leadership, and more.[5] Doubtless many men and women around the world have benefited from expanded access to excellent theological teaching through formal and informal online resources—including TGC's new

[1] This column is based on Brian Tabb's inaugural address as president of Bethlehem College and Seminary, delivered at Bethlehem Baptist Church in Minneapolis on 11 October 2024.

[2] James Emery White, "The Ending of Seminaries as We've Known Them," *Church & Culture*, 6 June 2022, https://www.churchandculture.org/blog/2022/6/6/the-ending-of-seminaries.

[3] See, for example, Timothy Paul Jones et al., *Teaching the World: Foundations for Online Theological Education* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2017); Kristen Ferguson, *Excellence in Online Education: Creating a Christian Community on Mission* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2020); Daniel R. Day, *Remotely Close: A Practical Guidebook for Christian Online Higher Education* (Bloomington: Westbow, 2024).

[4] 72 semester credits are the minimum requirement for M.Div. degrees, according to the ATS Commission Standards of Accreditation, 4.1, https://www.ats.edu/Standards-Of-Accreditation.

[5] These examples are taken from the Liberty University Online website: https://www.liberty.edu/online-at-liberty/divinity-degrees/. According to the 2023–2024 report by the Association of Theological Schools, Liberty Theological Seminary is the largest US seminary with over 4,000 students (FTE): https://tinyurl.com/3hnbwdkr.

Carson Center for Theological Renewal.[6] It has never been easier to enroll in seminary classes, and online programs do not require students to quit their jobs and relocate their families to focus full-time on pastoral preparation for three or four years. But does online seminary effectively equip aspiring pastors for decades of faithful, fruitful service to Christ's Church?

The great Princeton theologian B. B. Warfield cautioned, "A low view of the functions of the ministry will naturally carry with it a low conception of the training necessary for it."[7]

Indeed, pastoral ministry is about much more than coordinating church programs and conducting religious services. Pastor John Piper writes,

> Christian preachers, more than all others, should know that people are starving for God.… If the fountain of living water does not flow from the mountain of God's sovereign grace on Sunday morning, will not the people hew for themselves cisterns on Monday, "broken cisterns that can hold no water" (Jer. 2:13)?[8]

God's Word reminds us, "If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task" (1 Tim 3:1). The apostle calls pastors "stewards of the mysteries of God," and insists that stewards "be found faithful" (1 Cor 4:1). What a solemn yet joyful responsibility to teach the Bible and to lead Christ's Church! If we grasp a biblical vision of the pastoral office, then we will agree with Dietrich Bonhoeffer: "The matter of the proper education of preachers of the gospel is worthy of our ultimate commitment."[9]

What then is the essential task of the seminary today? How should that task be accomplished? I contend that the seminary's essential task, in partnership with the local church, is to equip faithful pastors to teach God's Word and to lead God's people. Let's consider three components of principled pastoral training: (1) *entrusting* sound doctrine, (2) *expounding* God's Book, and (3) *exemplifying* a holy life. I'll offer biblical support for these points from Paul's letters to Timothy, glean wisdom from past generations, and highlight reasons why I'm passionate about the mission and model of Bethlehem Seminary.

1. Entrusting Sound Doctrine

First, *entrusting sound doctrine.* Second Timothy 2:1–2 offers one of the clearest biblical imperatives for training the next generation of church leaders:

> You then, my child, be strengthened by the grace that is in Christ Jesus, and what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses *entrust* [παράθου] to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also.

The Greek verb rendered "entrust" conveys committing something for safekeeping or transmission to others.[10] Jesus uses this word for a servant entrusted with his master's property who will give an account

[6] https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/the-carson-center/. See Brian J. Tabb and Benjamin L. Gladd, "Announcing the Carson Center for Theological Renewal," *Themelios* 49.1 (2024): 1–3.

[7] Benjamin B. Warfield, "The Princeton Seminary Curriculum," *WRS* 15.2 (2008): 26.

[8] John Piper, *The Supremacy of God in Preaching*, 3rd ed. (Wheaton, IL Crossway, 2021), 152–53.

[9] Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Conspiracy and Imprisonment, 1940–1945*, ed. Mark S. Brocker, trans. Lisa E. Dahill, Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works 16 (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2006), 265. Cf. Paul R. House, *Bonhoeffer's Seminary Vision: A Case for Costly Discipleship and Life Together* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015).

[10] BDAG 772 (παρατίθημι, definition 3).

of his stewardship (Luke 12:48). Three times the apostle speaks of guarding "the deposit" (παραθήκη), that which is entrusted (1 Tim 6:20; 2 Tim 1:12, 14). This deposit is "the gospel of the glory of the happy [μακάριος] God," the news that Jesus Christ fulfilled all of God's promises through his righteous life, his saving death, and his victorious resurrection. Paul entrusts this gospel deposit to Timothy and exhorts him to "*follow the pattern of the sound words* that you have heard from me … [and] *guard the good deposit* entrusted to you" (2 Tim 1:13–14). But the apostle's vision does not stop with Timothy—he speaks here of four generations of gospel stewardship: (a) Paul (b) to Timothy (c) to "faithful men" (d) to "others." Think of a wise man who plants acorns so that his grandchildren and great-grandchildren can enjoy the shade of beautiful oak trees. That's the long-range foresight that fuels faithful investment in leadership development. In fact, the word "seminary" derives from the Latin *seminarium*, a seedbed. It's an environment for planting gospel seeds and preparing pastors. This is why Bethlehem Seminary and other evangelical institutions must remain gladly grounded and guided by sound doctrine, as expressed in historic and contemporary confessions of faith.

The world's oldest Baptist college was founded in Bristol, England, in 1720. The estate of the late Edward Terrill provided funding for a pastor "well skilled in the Greek and Hebrew tongues" who intended to "devote three afternoons in the week to the instruction of any number of young students, not exceeding twelve, who may be recommended by the churches, in the knowledge of the original languages, and other literature."[11]

Dr. Benjamin Foskett took up this calling and led the Bristol church and academy for thirty-eight years. Foskett trained at least sixty-four men including his successor, Hugh Evans. In a 1795 sermon, Dr. John Rippon (one of Evans's noted students) charged the Bristol Academy students to be "holy and happy yourselves" and to "make others, many others, holy and happy."[12] Do you hear the sweet notes of Christian hedonism in this seminary vision?

A commitment to prepare young men for ministry led the prince of preachers, C. H. Spurgeon, and his London church to establish the Pastors' College in 1861. Historian Geoff Chang writes,

> The tutors of the college were often not only scholars but also recognized elders in the church. They not only taught the students doctrine but also modeled godliness and leadership in the church.… The support of the [Tabernacle] members allowed the students to graduate without any debts. And as they participated in the worship, ministry, and discipline of a healthy church, the students gained a solid understanding of Baptist ecclesiology and a vision for pastoral ministry, "treasured up for future use."[13]

A similar long-range vision motivated Pastors Tom Steller and John Piper and elders of Bethlehem Baptist Church to establish The Bethlehem Institute in 1998, which is the forerunner of Bethlehem College and Seminary.[14] Like the Bristol Academy and Spurgeon's Pastors' College, Bethlehem's pastor-professors entrust sound doctrine to seminary apprentices in a God-centered, missions minded, highly

[11] John Rippon, "Towards A History of Bristol Baptist Coltlege, England," *The Baptist Memorial and Monthly Chronicle* (1843). Reprinted at the *Baptist History Homepage*, https://tinyurl.com/bdevdbyx. Cf. David Bebbington, "The Significance of Bristol Baptist College," *The Baptist Quarterly* 53 (2022): 149–51.

[12] Rippon, "Towards A History of Bristol Baptist College."

[13] Geoff Chang, "The Pastors' College: Spurgeon's Vision for Church-Based Training," *The Spurgeon Center,* 12 January 2021, https://tinyurl.com/2kf88ajv.

[14] See Tom Steller, "The Vision and History of The Bethlehem Institute," in *For the Fame of God's Name: Essays in Honor of John Piper*, ed. C. Samuel Storms and Justin Taylor (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 508–15.

relational, church-based school generously supported by the saints. I have benefited personally from this education in serious joy. And I rejoice that there are hundreds of "holy and happy" Bethlehem grads filling pulpits and serving Christ across this country and around the world, making others "holy and happy" as well.

2. Expounding God's Book

Second, pastors must be equipped to *expound* holy Scripture as approved workmen, "rightly handling the word of truth." I put this apostolic charge at the top of every seminary course syllabus: "Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth" (2 Tim 2:15).

"Rightly handling" conveys care and precision. This Greek verb, ὀρθοτομέω, means "to cut straight" or "guide along a straight path." We confess that "all Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness" (2 Tim 3:16). So it is vitally important for the seminary to train pastors to be Bible men, wielding the sword of the Spirit, which comes to us in a sheath of Greek and Hebrew.[15]

Consider the years of rigorous training required to become a neurosurgeon or an army general. Harvard Medical School does not prepare doctors virtually, nor does West Point train officers online. Why would we take the preparation of preachers of God's Word less seriously?[16] Over a century ago Warfield wrote,

> If the minister is the mouth-piece of the Most High, charged with a message to deliver, to expound and enforce … nothing will suffice … but … to know the Book; to know it at first hand; and to know it through and through. And what is required first of all for training men for such a ministry is that the Book should be given them in its very words as it has come from God's hand and in the fullness of its meaning, as that meaning has been ascertained by the labors of generations of men of God who have brought to bear upon it all the resources of sanctified scholarship and consecrated thought.… A comprehensive and thorough theological training is the condition of a really qualified ministry. When we satisfy ourselves with a less comprehensive and thorough theological training, we are only condemning ourselves to a less qualified ministry.[17]

[15] This line is adapted from Luther: "The languages are the sheath in which this sword of the Spirit [Eph. 6:17] is contained; they are the casket in which this jewel is enshrined; they are the vessel in which this wine is held; they are the larder in which this food is stored.… If through our neglect we let the languages go (which God forbid!), we shall … lose the gospel." Martin Luther, "To the Councilmen of All Cities in Germany That They Establish and Maintain Christian Schools (1524)," in *Martin Luther's Basic Theological Writings*, ed. William R. Russell and Timothy F. Lull, 3rd ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2012), 463.

[16] For a similar emphasis, see Lewis Guest IV, "We Are Soul Surgeons: Why I Would Never Skip Seminary," *Desiring God*, 7 November 2019, https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/we-are-soul-surgeons.

[17] Warfield, "The Princeton Seminary Curriculum," 29. Machen expresses similar sentiments: "If you are to tell what the Bible does say, you must be able to read the Bible for yourself. And you cannot read the Bible for yourself unless you know the languages in which it was written.… Sad is it for the church if it has only ministers whose preparation for their special calling is of the customary superficial kind." J. Gresham Machen, "Westminster Theological Seminary: Its Purpose and Plan," in *Selected Shorter Writings*, ed. D. G. Hart (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R

J. Gresham Machen lamented in 1918 that "in many colleges, the study of Greek is almost abandoned" in favor of more "practical" studies.[18] In recent years many seminaries have made Greek and Hebrew exegesis optional in their M.Div. programs (not to mention other seminary graduate degrees that require no coursework in biblical languages). This is a concerning trend. Without adequate training in Greek, how can a pastor rightly handle the apostle's glorious 200-word prayer in Ephesians 1:3–14? Without Hebrew, how can a preacher unpack the expansive acrostic of Psalm 119? Original language exegesis is difficult, but it is not drudgery. Studying God's word in Greek and Hebrew should lead us to sing:

> Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good! Blessed is the man who takes refuge in him! (Ps 34:8)
>
> Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!… To him be the glory forever. (Rom 11:33–36)

The well-equipped expositor carefully and prayerfully studies God's Book in the original languages. He is no second hander but assiduously attends to what the text actually says, not just what commentators say. The seminary today must employ Bible-saturated professors and maintain a Bible-saturated curriculum to prepare faithful pastors to rightly handle God's Book.

3. Exemplifying a Holy Life

Training pastors involves *entrusting* sound doctrine and equipping them to *expound* the Word of God in Greek and Hebrew. It also entails *exemplifying* a holy life. Paul exhorts the Ephesian elders, "Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock" (Acts 20:28), and he instructs Timothy, "Keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching" (1 Tim 4:16).

As the Scottish pastor Robert Murray McCheyne once wrote: "Your own soul is your first and greatest care.… It is not great talents God blesses so much as great likeness to Jesus. A holy minister is an awful weapon in the hand of God."[19] I agree but would add: a holy *and happy* minister, whose soul is supremely satisfied in God, is a mighty weapon in the Lord's hand.

First Timothy 3 sets forth qualifications for those who oversee God's household. The list begins, perhaps surprisingly, with a holy *aspiration* for the work (v. 1). David Mathis says, "Christ grabs his pastors by the heart; he doesn't twist them by the arm."[20] Aspiring pastors should be "above reproach" or

Publishing, 2004), 188–89. Or as Luther writes, "Let us be sure of this: we will not long preserve the gospel without the [biblical] languages." Luther, "To the Councilmen," 463.

[18] J. Gresham Machen, "The Minister and His Greek Testament," in *Selected Shorter Writings*, ed. D. G. Hart (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2004), 211.

[19] Iain H. Murray, "Robert Murray M'Cheyne," *Banner of Truth,* 12 November 2001, https://tinyurl.com/3dead-npc. Similarly, the English Puritan Richard Baxter once wrote, "If the work of the Lord be not soundly done upon your own hearts, how can you expect that he should bless your labours for … others?" Richard Baxter, *The Reformed Pastor*, ed. William Orme, The Practical Works of the Rev. Richard Baxter 14 (London: James Duncan, 1830), 68.

[20] David Mathis, *Workers for Your Joy: The Call of Christ on Christian Leaders* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2022), 46–47.

"blameless"—the standard is not perfection but a godly pattern, a reputation for integrity, a track record of faithfulness at home and in public.

For current and aspiring pastors, *self*-examination is important yet insufficient. God's Word calls us to "take care" and "exhort *one another* every day" (Heb 3:12–13). Pastoral ministry has been called a "dangerous calling."[21] It is spiritually perilous without regular, joyful communion with the Lord and meaningful accountability with others. Aspiring pastors should study, pray, and serve in intentional, face-to-face community with mentors, peers, and fellow church members.[22] As the Proverb says, "Iron sharpens iron."[23] So-called "virtual learning communities" are a poor substitute.

Seminary students not only need excellent instruction in theology, church history, homiletics, and exegesis; they also need to observe and emulate faithful models. Paul frequently exhorts the churches, "Imitate me."[24] He reminds Timothy, "You … have followed my teaching, my conduct, my aim in life, my faith, my patience, my love, my steadfastness, my persecutions.… [So] continue in what you have learned.…" (2 Tim 3:10–14). It is not enough for seminarians to "follow" popular theologians online and to "like" their social media posts. They need to follow faithful pastors to their homes, to the hospital, to elder meetings and prayer meetings, to emulate their lives and ministries. After all, we are preparing men to lead real, embodied congregations, not online religious groups.

I am grateful to God for outstanding professors who equipped me to study God's Word and also took an interest in my life. I am grateful to God for the pastors, elders, and church members who invited me into their homes, met me for coffee, took me to conferences, and modeled what it looks like to be a godly husband, father, and servant in the church.

At Bethlehem we call our seminary students "pastoral apprentices." They engage in hands-on ministry in partner churches under the guidance of seasoned shepherds. I am grateful to God for these faithful pastors and commend their personal commitment to mentoring future ministers. Don Carson writes, "We are called to emulate worthy Christian leaders. We are called to be worthy Christian leaders whom others will emulate. God help us."[25]

Conclusion

I contend that the essential task of the seminary today remains largely unchanged from the aims of Bristol Academy, Spurgeon's Pastor's College, Warfield's Princeton, and Machen's Westminster. In vital partnership with the church, the seminary must continue to focus on equipping pastors to teach God's Word and to lead God's people. Pastoral preparation entails *entrusting* sound doctrine, *expounding* God's Book, and *exemplifying* a holy life. As online programs proliferate, aspiring pastors should prefer the ancient paths of rigorous face-to-face seminary education with intentional mentoring by godly pastors and professors and deep friendship with fellow students.

[21] Paul David Tripp, *Dangerous Calling: Confronting the Unique Challenges of Pastoral Ministry* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012). I reflect further on this topic in an earlier column, "Fulfill Your Ministry," *Themelios* 44.2 (2019): 211–15.

[22] Bonhoeffer writes, "He who is alone with his sin is utterly alone," but "Our brother breaks the circle of self-deception." Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together: The Classic Exploration of Christian Community* (New York: HarperOne, 1954), 110, 116.

[23] Prov 27:17.

[24] See 1 Cor 4:16; 11:1; Phil 3:17; cf. 2 Thess 3:7, 9.

[25] D. A. Carson, *Basics for Believers: An Exposition of Philippians* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 95.

Let me close with final encouragements to several groups of people.

To Teachers and Leaders of Seminaries: Hold fast to historic Christian doctrine, and treasure God's trustworthy Word. Cautionary tales abound of institutions that have drifted from their founding confessions and missions—may that not be true of us. Continue to follow the ancient paths, where the good way is (Jer 6:18), as you seek to glorify and enjoy God and build up his church through your teaching and scholarship.[26]

To Pastors: Continue to faithfully feed and lead Christ's sheep, facing the difficulties and disappointments of ministry with the joyous day of Christ ever in view.[27] In this life we are sorrowful *yet always rejoicing* (2 Cor 6:10). Receive this encouragement from John Newton:

> Every blessing we receive from [the Lord] is a token of his favour, and a pledge of that far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory which he has reserved for us. O! to hear him say at last, "Well done, good and faithful servant, enter thou into the joy of thy Lord!" will be a rich amends for all that we can lose, suffer, or forbear, for his sake.[28]

To Seminarians and Aspiring Ministers: Pastoral ministry is a worthy calling, "a noble task" (1 Tim 3:1). I urge you to give yourself to serious study without taking shortcuts. Watch your life and doctrine, pursuing holiness and happiness in God. Learn the biblical languages and sound theology with professors and peers that know you and care about you. Love the local church. And find joyful, faithful pastors whose lives are worthy of emulation.[29]

To Church Members: Pray for and encourage your pastors and men aspiring to pastoral ministry. Pray for and invest generously in faithful seminaries that hold fast to historic Christian doctrine and God's inerrant Word. Remember the examples of the Bristol Academy and Spurgeon's Pastors' College, where church members generously supported seminarians so that they could graduate debt-free and launch immediately into church ministry—investments "treasured up for future use."

Jesus has promised to build his church, and the church in every generation needs faithful shepherds. Seminaries are servants of the church, tasked with preparing future pastors who will guard the gospel deposit and teach others to obey all that Jesus commanded. May we recommit ourselves to the task of equipping pastors for Christ's church with biblical conviction, counter-cultural courage, and confident joy in our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. May God help us.

[26] Similarly, J. V. Fesko, "The Goal of Theological Scholarship: Academy or the Church?," *Themelios* 49.3 (2024).

[27] Phil 1:6; 1 Cor 1:8.

[28] John Newton, "Letter XI," in *The Works of the Rev. John Newton*, 12 vols. (London: T. Hamilton, 1821), 2:45–46.

[29] For more biblical and practical wisdom on this topic, see Bobby Jamieson, *The Path to Being a Pastor: A Guide for the Aspiring*, 9Marks (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2021).

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STRANGE TIMES

Glorifying Service in Self-Obsessed Times

— Daniel Strange —

Daniel Strange is director of Crosslands Forum, a centre for cultural engagement and missional innovation, and contributing editor of Themelios. He is a fellow of The Keller Center for Cultural Apologetics.

In a previous column I offered some observations on approaching formal theological study. Here is an accompanying piece on finishing formal theological study, which is based on a homily I gave recently at our seminary's graduation evening.

> As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace: whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies—in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen. (1 Peter 4:10–11)

'This is not the end. This is not even the beginning of the end. But it is perhaps the end of the beginning.' Churchill's famous war-time words are apposite for those of you who have just graduated this evening. Please hear me: I am in no way wanting to diminish your achievements or devalue that piece of paper you are proudly holding. Tonight is a milestone to be rightly marked and celebrated in the presence of friends and family and with thanksgiving to God for your hard-work, perseverance, and growth over these past few years. However, any decent seminary should shudder if it thought that it had inculcated the idea that tonight was the termination of your theological education: been there, done that, ticked the box, received the bag of free books from the publishers, got the t-shirt (other branded merch is available)—'never again, and now on with the rest of my life.'

It's been our intention from the first days of your studies here to pass on, even drill into you, that as disciples of Christ, at whatever 'academic' level, we are always students and life-long learners as we go deeper and deeper into the unfathomable mysteries of God. We pray that your time with us in formal study has been a good push-start, establishing habits and rhythms to aid this growth, together with a Spirit-given humility that recognises you know less and less but which creates a thirst to know Jesus and his Word more and more. In the context of these opening remarks, I want to spend a few moments in these verses from Peter's first letter, applying them to you graduates in your responsibilities in pastoral leadership, whatever shape that may take, formally and informally, both now and into the future.

1. Not On-Lookers and Passengers, but Lookerafterers and Passeroners

In Christ's church there are to be no on-lookers or passengers. Each and everyone has a gift and they are in two categories here, speaking and serving. There are no 'ungifted' who look up to the 'gifted' in admiration or envy. Conversely (and this might be especially applicable to you this evening as seminary graduates with letters now after your name), there are no 'gifted' who look down on 'ungifted' pew-fodder in superiority or condescension. There are no on-lookers but—and here's a new word for your theological lexicon—all disciples are lookerafterers. The gifts you have received are not yours. You are simply stewards of them.

But that 'simply' is not at all simple. Have you ever had the responsibility of looking after someone else's pet? On several occasions we looked after my boss's dog when they went away. We gave that dog more treats, more walks, and more attention than our own dog. We felt doubly responsible. And so, it is with the gifts of grace you have been given by God. In your theological training, you have been developing in your character, convictions, and competencies in line with those criteria for pastoral ministry as outlined in the New Testament. It's appropriate that you do feel the weight of responsibility as those who are looking after these precious gifts of grace. If you have a speaking gift, you don't want to be graffitiing over God's words; your ideas will sustain neither you or your people, but God's will. To this end as a life-long learner, you will want to continue to study, becoming a more and more competent and conscientious steward of the gifts you've been given. You're a lookerafterer.

Moreover, while there are no passengers in Christ's church—and here's another new term for you—all God's people are passeroners. Have you ever received a gift you thought was for you but was actually for someone else? Awkward and embarrassing, isn't it? The final destination of these gifts of grace you have received is not with you. You are a link in the chain with a final destination of 'others'.

Having a large family means that over the years I have been able to conduct field research on the phenomenology of children's parties and particularly the game of pass-the-parcel. Observations are as follows: playing pass-the-parcel with two- to three-year olds is an overwhelmingly soul-sapping experience. First you spend an inordinate amount of time getting the kids to form a circle. The music starts and the little munchkins jump up thinking it's still musical bumps. So, you apply some physical pressure (just a little bit!) in getting them to sit in that circle. The music starts and the said parcel is produced and put in a child's lap. Child is invariably clueless, looking around, perhaps picking their nose. Now slightly frustrated but trying to smile through gritted teeth, you end up picking up the parcel yourself, putting it into the next child's lap, who is equally distracted as they want a drink or want to go to the bathroom. Your back is now killing you as you end up going around the circle playing the game by yourself with half the kids having got up and wandered off.

Now, same kids two years later. 'Kids, it's time for pass-the-parcel'. Immediately a perfect geometric circle is formed. There is complete silence, the kids looking straight ahead in total focus. These are pass-the-parcel assassins. A child raises their hand,

'Please sir, what version are we playing?'

'What version?!'

You gulp slightly as the music starts. These adorable ones have learnt every trick in the book in holding onto that parcel. You have now become the target of all the mysterious arts of subterfuge, deception, and distraction. But you remain strong, and it's only as you sweep in to forcibly move on that

parcel that the child's white knuckles are relaxed and they suddenly fling it onto the next person smiling at you all the time.

Now we have been given these amazing gifts of God's grace to pass on, and without wanting to be flippant, I would like to suggest that every Christian community is the equivalent of a huge game of pass the parcel. Some of our people are like those little kids. They don't know what's going on, they are distracted, they don't get the point. They are mere passengers. And your task as a leader, speaking and serving, is to alert them to the fact that they are in this circle of brothers and sisters and they have in their lap a gift of God's grace, unique to them, that they are to pass on to someone else. In doing this the body will self-grow. And you tell them they are not to be introspective but to get stuck in, speaking and serving—there are lots of things we should be doing for one another as Christians, and as they begin to do these things they will discover that they have been gifted in some areas and not in others. You give them opportunities to serve.

Some of our people are like the older kids. They know the game very well but want to keep that gift in their lap, bringing it with them to church every week and taking it home again. And your job in loving firmness is to tell them that, actually, their gift is not for them, and get them to relax their grip, and to pass it on to its proper destination. Your temptation as a leader with 'qualifications' in convictions, competencies, and character is always going to be, in your frustration, to try and play the game yourself—move the parcel yourself around, forget about the others. But you see, here is where the illustration breaks down, because there is not just one parcel we are passing on but many, many parcels. Together these gifts administer God's grace in its various forms. I like to think there is an intentional symmetry here as the various (ποικίλος) forms of God's grace match the various (ποικίλος) trials mentioned at the beginning of the letter (1:6). Think of all the challenges that face us as Christians today: God's grace can counter all these challenges. But we need to stand together with everyone passing on their gifts. We can stand through everything if we stand together with all the gifts God has given. But if one person does not pass on their gift, the body is inevitably weakened here. We all need each other, and you play a crucial role in stewarding this stewardship. You're a passeroner.

2. Not Distracting from God's Glory, but Distracted by God's Glory

Graduates, as lookerafterers and passeroners, you are servants. Of course, at this institution, as at many others, we all talk a good game about servant leadership. But modelling it in reality, both in an institution like a seminary and in Christ's church, is another thing. I wonder whether this is why, when it comes to the serving gifts, Paul reminds us that in our serving we are to do so in God's strength so that Christ is glorified. Could it be that serving gifts may give the wrong impression that they can be done off our own back, in our own strength? God gives the 'supernatural' stuff to those who speak, but when it comes to serving, well, we just get on with it, don't we? But we forget that serving is a gift of grace that is not 'natural' at all. We can all offer hospitality, but to offer 'hospitality without grumbling' (v. 9) is a gift.

Moreover, when we serve in our own strength and not God's, then we easily become a distraction from God being glorified. Armed with your new theological qualification, I hope you are feeling a renewed sense of excitement and energy for where the Lord has put you. You're ready to get going. But you know, because it's in the water of our tribe, that our 'glorifying God through serving indicator' is not on how joyful, gracious, and light our serving is, as Jesus promises, but rather on how tired, stressed, and busy we are. This is a distraction away from God and onto us, but I think it is something we often

welcome because as leaders we know that we often want to get in on the act and get the attention to be on us. When the camera is focused on the news reporter in an outside broadcast, we're like one of those idiots in the background shouting 'hello mum'.

In our serving we are not to be a distraction. We want people to be seeing and glorifying Christ in our serving. We are to be transparent. We want people to see right through us and to be praising Jesus Christ for the gifts we are looking after and passing on. After we have spoken or served, we should want people saying of us not 'he's amazing isn't he', but rather 'He's amazing isn't He.' As the hymn line goes, 'May his beauty rest upon me, as I seek the lost to win, And may they forget the channel, seeing only Him.' Or, as Richard Baxter so beautifully put it, 'I was but a pen in God's hand, and what praise is due a pen?' Graduates, many congratulations, but you're just a pen.

I realise the counter-cultural nature of this. This is the exact opposite of the football striker who scores the goal, runs to the touchline, sticks out his chest, and sucks in the adulation of the crowd, loving the glory and honour. And we are saturated in this. I don't like being anonymous. I want to be remembered. I want a legacy. I hate people looking right through me. And we are influenced by a world which screams out for glory and honour and attention, and this inevitably creeps into the church. The god of this age is one of self-focus, self-absorption, hyper-self-consciousness. The result is plain to see: both church and academy is full of personality cults, those who are lionised and put on a pedestal. And some end up believing their own publicity, losing connection with the head. When they speak and serve, they are like one of those badly dubbed films, because although they mouth a lot of words, all we hear is 'me, me, me'. And don't think we are not partly to blame because we put those people there: we massage egos, we lionise and idolise.

Yes, you are the focus of attention this evening, and rightly so. But how do we prevent ourselves from becoming a distraction in our ministry? Thankfully, I think Peter offers us some clues as to a way out. First, let's go back to Peter's exhortation that we are to serve in God's strength. In reality, of course, everything we do relies on God's strength, not just our serving but our very existence. We exist only by God's word, and so serving in God's strength is recognition of this greater metaphysical fact of our totally and utterly dependent creatureliness compared to a totally and utterly self-sufficient Almighty Creator. Second, there is Peter's doxology, which I like to think is nothing other than a spontaneous outburst in wonderment and praise of his Lord and God, whom he loves and adores as he reflects on the nature of true service. As he talks about what many would think are mundane and even ordinary topics of Christians serving each other, he cannot help but end on focusing on God's glory.

This is our way of escape from our self-absorption in our service. This is why your graduation this evening is only one stage in a life-long journey of theological exploration and discovery. As we continue to study, contemplate, meditate, and engage our affections, we will become more and more distracted by God's glory. Only the overwhelming weightiness of God has the power to pull us out of ourselves, and we get that creature feeling when compared to the One who created us. When we are brushed by God's glory, we want to speak God's words because these are the only words worth speaking, we want to serve in God's strength because we realise our total dependence on Him. And as we are distracted by God's glory, so our petty self-interest and self-absorption fades into nothingness. We don't care about it anymore because we are transfixed on the Lord of Glory. We realise more and more the futility and stupidity of thinking of wanting to take glory for ourselves. Beholding is becoming. Our own identity is bound up with Christ; we are in him and our identity is bound up in Him. The implications of this are that we will be glorified because Christ is glorified: 'Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of

God and co-heirs of Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory' (Rom 8:17). We will share in Christ's glory, noting though the pattern of suffering before glory, something Peter notes in subsequent verses. But the glory that awaits us is incomparable to our puny human-given glory. Isn't it futile then to want to take any glory ourselves in our speaking and serving? It's crazy, it's madness, it's the nature of sin. In repentance we need to take it all to Christ, the One who is not only our supreme exemplar of service, but our Saviour, the suffering servant who gave his life as a ransom for many.

This evening, at the end of your beginning, our prayer for you is that in your speaking you would speak as one who speaks oracles of God, and that your serving would be in the strength that God supplies—in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

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The Future of Difference: Evangelicals and Gender Essentialism

— Mark Saucy —

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Abstract: Against a wider cultural narrative that now pathologizes even biologically determined differences between men and women, evangelicals respond with a theological anthropology grounded in the biblical texts. This essay briefly traces the intellectual history of those determined to erase gender difference and in contrast proposes a biblical paradigm of difference based upon the theology of the body and the relationality of the soul. A final section offers an analysis of evangelical egalitarianism and complementarianism against the culture's paradigm and the proposed biblical account. Both sides make important contributions to the issue, but only one, appropriately modified, offers a way into the fullness of Scripture's message the church needs in our cultural moment.

When Simone de Beauvoir famously proclaimed, "One is not born a woman but becomes one," the idea that gender differences between women and men were socially generated radically changed the gender conversation.[1] Since that time, traditional ideas about the existence of essential differences between the sexes—differences rooted in an underlying, unchangeable essence of womanhood and manhood—began to give way to anti-essentialist conclusions that either denied a gender essentialism altogether or promoted a "new essentialism" grounded solely in the choices and desires of individuals. In both cases, the anti-essentialist juggernaut raged and eventually overwhelmed biology so that even male and female bodies were irrelevant to one's gender identity. All with the effect that now in many circles the notions of "man" and "woman" have disappeared entirely, and the simple question "What is a woman?" (recently dodged by a sitting Supreme Court justice) cannot afford to be answered.[2]

To such a radical anti-essentialist agenda, Evangelicals and Catholics have responded with a renewed attention to the Christian tradition's theological anthropology that posits human nature as a

[1] Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trans. H. M. Parshley (London: Cape, 1953), 267.

[2] Compare recent titles: Carrie Gress, *The End of Woman: How Smashing the Patriarchy Has Destroyed Us* (Washington, DC: Regenery, 2023) and "The Abolition of Man and Woman," *The Wall Street Journal,* 24 June 2020, https://www.wsj.com/articles/the-abolition-of-man-and-woman-11593107500; also John Grabowski, *Unraveling Gender: The Battle Over Sexual Difference* (Gastonia, NC: Tan, 2022), 56. According to Hanna-Barbara Gerl-Falkovitz, "The question about the 'essence of the woman' has been taboo since Simone de Beauvoir" ("Gender Difference: Critical Questions Concerning Gender Studies," in *Women in Christ: Toward a New Feminism,* ed. Michele M. Schumacher [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004], 4).

holistic dualism of body and soul, material and immaterial.[3] In this tradition, the sexuality of the body delivers a divinely sourced message about who we are. Beyond this foundation, however, the parties of the evangelical gender debate move in different directions on the essentialism question. For their part, complementarians assert an essentialism that is located in the body, but one that is personal in social relationships, too. Egalitarians affirm the body as the site of an essential gender difference, but also claim the Bible says little beyond that for the differences between women and men.

In this essay, and with an eye to the anti-essentialism of contemporary culture, I propose to evaluate the two evangelical options. Part 1 briefly surveys essentialism's ups and downs in the broader culture, especially since de Beauvoir. In part 2, I propose a biblical gender essentialism that is sensitive to both the sexuality of the body as well as the relationality of the soul—the inner and outer man of the Christian tradition. In part 3, I compare the proposal of part 2 against the options in evangelical complementarianism and egalitarianism for efficacy and standing in our present cultural moment. Both sides indeed have something valuable we need, but one side, appropriately modified, offers the fullest biblical picture of gender difference and, I would propose, the greatest resilience and hope for the future of gender difference in the church, if not society, too.

1. Difference Pathologized

The culture's history with gender difference is in large measure a subset of the history of the modern feminist movement. Within this context, some form of the "essentialist fallacy"—that difference for women inevitably means a destiny of oppression in patriarchal societies—is always in the crosshairs of suspicion.[4] The answer to this suspicion for most of this history has been the promotion of broad gender *similarity*, so that women might achieve social equality with men. Within this agenda, however, there are distinct movements orbiting around the question of whether gender difference is hard-wired by nature or the result of "social coding" imposed by the culture. We turn to a brief survey of these movements now.[5]

1.1. Difference as Dangerous

Contemporary feminist thought about gender difference relies heavily on the tradition of essentialism inherited from preceding generations. Differences between men and women are still

[3] Gregg R. Allison lists thirteen recent offerings on the topic ("A Theology of Human Embodiment," *SBJT* 63.2 [2021]: 67 n. 9), to which could be added: Gress, *End of Woman*; Abigail Favale's *The Genesis of Gender: A Christian Theory* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2022); and Grabowski's *Unraveling Gender*.

[4] The common denominator of all streams of feminism is "the conviction that women, as a collectivity have always been treated unjustly in patriarchal societies" (Beatriz Vollmer Coles, "New Feminism: A Sex-Gender Reunion," in *Women in Christ*, 54, citing the specialist of feminist history, Guy Bouchard, "L'hétéropolitique féministe," *Laval théologique et philosophique* 45 [1989]: 95–120, here, 100–101).

[5] In many ways the feminist narratives for essentialism track with the four so-called "waves" of feminism often used to chronicle the intellectual history of the movement. See, for example, such accounts in Favale, *The Genesis of Gender*, 53–83; Sharon James, *God's Design for Women in an Age of Gender Confusion* (Darlington, UK: EP, 2019), 31–50; and Michelle Lee-Barnewall, *Neither Complementarian nor Egalitarian: A Kingdom Corrective to the Evangelical Gender Debate* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2016), 15–68. It should also be noted that many feminists deny the linear wave-model to describe their intellectual history. See Helen Pluckrose and James Lindsay, *Cynical Theories: How Activist Scholarship Made Everything about Race, Gender, and Identity—and Why This Harms Everybody* (Durham, NC: Pitchstone, 2020), 298 n. 4.

rooted in the biology of the body. However, this was part of the problem, because men, who wielded social power, used the belief in distinct essences to justify women's oppression and inferiority. The incipient responses to the plight of women in this period, usually first traced to the Romanticism of Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1790), did not deny essential differences so much as they attempted to dim or mute them.[6] In a move that would fund feminist dogma into the modern day, Wollstonecraft saw that the struggle for equality demanded a focus on the similarity between women and men as human beings. Women's rights were indeed *human* rights, and equal treatment could only be achieved by highlighting the common humanity both sexes share in rationality and virtue. This similarity doctrine did not deny difference so much as shift attention away from it. Women's identity comes to be understood in terms of her nature as a human creature, not her nature as a woman.[7]

1.2. New Essentialism

The leveling of gender differences took a new and radical turn in the mid-twentieth century with de Beauvoir's famous claim cited earlier. Emerging from an existentialist root, this branch of feminism now set the stage for the final postmodern dissolution of essentialism, as we will see below.[8] At this point, the etiology of gender differences—ultimately, even biological differences—is found entirely in the social order. All difference is in fact just a mask; a matter of how gender is performed. The seminal essay by Candace West and Don H. Zimmerman, "Doing Gender," states the case: "We contend that the 'doing' of gender is undertaken by women and men whose competence as members of society is hostage to its production. Doing gender involves a complex of socially guided perceptual, interactional, and micropolitical activities that cast particular pursuits as expressions of masculine and feminine 'natures.'"[9] This new essentialism renders all gender difference as a "static" discussion with even reproductive biology largely rendered "indifferent," thanks to the Pill and abortion rights.[10] There is no masculine or feminine "nature" underlying the constructs society imposes upon its members. Men and women need to be seen as the same, for they are essentially the same. As the radical feminist Shulamith Firestone famously wrote: "The end goal of feminist revolution must be, unlike that of the first feminist

[6] Elaine Storkey, citing the work of Jean Joseph Goux (Michel Foucault and Jean Joseph Goux, "Irigaray vs. The Utopia of the Neutral Sex," in *Engaging with Irigaray*, ed. Carolyn Burke, Naomi Schor, and Margaret Whitford [New York: Columbia University Press, 1994], 189), notes that essentialism still remains at the heart of this period of feminism (Storkey, *Origins of Difference: The Gender Debate Revisited* [Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2001], 25–26).

[7] See the treatment of Wollstonecraft in Gress, *The End of Woman*, chs. 1–2.

[8] De Beauvoir was a long-time companion of the existentialist, Jean Paul Sartre. See Grabowski (*Unraveling Gender*, 65–66) for an account of the existentialist core of feminism of the 1960s and 1970s. Among other points he notes the impact of Sartre for essentialism along with its theological root: "For Sartre, 'existence precedes essence'" (citing Sartre, *Existentialism is a Humanism*, ed. John Kulka, trans. Carol Macomber [New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007], vii). Contrary to philosophers like Aristotle, there is no human nature that a person actualizes and that is the basis of his or her flourishing. It is up to us to fashion our own identity and our own self-definition of what it means to be human. The ultimate basis of Sartre's claim is theological: "There is no human nature, since there is no God to conceive it" (Sartre, *Existentialism is a Humanism*, 15).

[9] Candace West and Don H. Zimmerman, "Doing Gender," *Gender and Society* 1 (1987): 126.

[10] For the impact that the Pill and abortion have had in making the female body's fertility something pathological to be rendered medically sterile through pharmacology (the Pill) and surgery (abortion), see Favale, *Genesis of Gender*, 85–114.

movement, not just the elimination of male privilege but of the sex distinction itself: genital differences between human beings would no longer matter culturally."[11]

1.3. Difference Reclaimed

Parallel to the new essentialism of de Beauvoir and her followers was also a return to real gender difference. Whereas difference had to be diminished or even erased in the name of equality prior to and after de Beauvoir, other feminists pushed back and contended for the unique feminine "voice" of women. Real equality demanded more than downplaying difference because that still left in place the Western Cartesian tradition of moral reasoning that valorized the masculine virtues of abstraction, individuality, and the appeal to universal principles. The feminine genius in the relational self needed more definition, not dismissal.[12] Carol Gilligan's *In a Different Voice* (1982) was revolutionary in this regard, lionizing the features of the feminine relational moral domain and, at the same time, taming the androcentric Cartesian one. She describes her work at one point thus:

> For the present, my aim has been to demonstrate the centrality of the concepts of responsibility and care in women's constructions of the moral domain, to indicate the close tie in women's thinking between conceptions of the self and the conceptions of morality, and, finally, to argue the need for an expanded developmental theory that would include, rather than rule out from developmental consideration, the difference in the feminine voice.[13]

The feminine relational, connected self, rather than being inferior to the Cartesian masculine self was truly its equal and valid complement for the domain of moral truth. The unique feminine psyche ("voice") was often thought to emerge directly from women's biology that then was performed and accountable to the distinct gender roles exposed by the "new essentialism" discussed above.[14]

1.4. De-essentialized Essentialism

The return and even celebration of gender difference marked by Gilligan's revolution gained new impetus when the continental struggle against the patriarchy entered the American arena in the early 2000s. However, the new move included a radical turn and claimed the final frontier that even biological difference is not absolute. European feminism had always been more inclined to a difference-agenda over a similarity one, but only under the condition that all "reality" is a mere linguistic game completely and utterly circumscribed by society.[15] Elaine Storkey notes well the postmodern challenge to the traditional American feminist similarity doctrine:

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[11] Shulamith Firestone, *The Dialectic of Sex: The Case for Feminist Revolution* (New York: Morrow, 1970), 22; cited by Grawbowski, *Unraveling Gender,* 74–75; cf. also Coles, "New Feminism," 56–57.

[12] Susan Hekman, "Subject," in *The Bloomsbury Handbook of 21st-Century Feminist Theory*, ed. Robin Truth Goodman (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2019), 23.

[13] Carol Gilligan, "In a Different Voice: Women's Conceptions of Self and of Morality," in *The Future of Difference*, ed. Hester Eisenstein and Alice Jardine (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1985), 316.

[14] See the summary by Nancy Chodorow, whose own project remains closer to the new essentialism's similarity dogma. She considers gender difference to be the product of socialization and developmental attachment patterns (Nancy Julia Chodorow, "Gender, Relation, and Difference in Psychoanalytic Perspective," in *The Future of Difference*, 3–19).

[15] Alice Jardine, "Prelude: The Future of Difference," in *The Future of Difference*, xxv–xxvi.

> An egalitarianism that rests on the abandonment of difference is the most subtle way yet of making women invisible, for tradition, language, and concepts have for too long all been formed within a male dominant framework. Espousing "equality" while everything else stays the same is to give the appearance of empowering women while denying the reality of it. It is in fact to capitulate to the deeper structures of the patriarchy in the name of reform.[16]

With the postmodern turn, everything thought to be natural, self-evident, and true is now regarded as only a series of language signs. Even notions of "equality" and "difference" are illusory products of patriarchal power dynamics.[17] Difference cannot even be found in the sexual binary of the body but rather lived only on the basis of one's narrative "standing."[18] Difference is now re-defined across all boundaries of all individuals, of genders and classes of people.[19] Under this linguistic press, any absolute idea of "man" and "woman" literally disappears. There is no essence to either—not culturally and, more importantly, not biologically. Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble* (1990) was an early voice championing the virtual disappearance of the body "by asserting that the 'natural' body as such does not exist 'before' the language and meaning of cultures. Language cultivates different bodily sex differences…. Stated simply, even biology is a matter of culture. In order to liberate oneself as a woman, one can subjectively 'engineer' one's open-ended sex."[20]

At this point of our account, the only essentialism left is the relativistic and individualistic one, which for sexuality means anything goes but "the binary."[21] Whereas in the three previous stages, the body remains an aspect of gender identity, however muted in the relentless pursuit of similarity, now under postmodern ideology the body is a mere screen upon which the "real" person writes their own identity.[22] None of the traditional, standard categories of difference apply, except to see them as an unwanted challenge to what it means to be human.

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[16] Storkey, *Origins of Difference*, 55.

[17] Elaine Graham, *Making the Difference: Gender, Personhood and Theology* (London: Mowbray, 1995), 185.

[18] Storkey, *Origins of Difference*, 57. According to Judith Lorber ("Shifting Paradigms and Challenging Categories," *Social Problems*, 53.4 [2006]: 448), the postmodern turn introduces three new elements to our understanding of gender: (1) Making gender, not biological sex, central; (2) Treating gender and sexuality as social constructs; (3) Focusing upon one's *standpoint*—that is, one's identity (cited by Pluckrose and Lindsay, *Cynical Theories*, 138).

[19] The notion of intersectionality, first introduced around 1985, now "reconceptualizes 'difference' as an ongoing interactional accomplishment" among all individuals of all genders, races, and classes (Candace West and Sarah Fenstermakeer, "Doing Difference," in *Doing Gender, Doing Difference: Inequality, Power, and Institutional Change*, ed. Sarah Fenstermaker and Candace West [New York: Routledge, 2002], 56; cf. also Jardine, "Prelude," xxv–xxvii). Because of individuals' unique standing/narrative, difference is strictly a matter of individuals' experience.

[20] Gerl-Falkovitz, "Gender Difference," 10. In *Bodies That Matter*, Butler argues that the materiality of the body ("sex") is not a given "on which the construct of gender is artificially imposed," but is itself the result of certain regulated practices "forcibly materialized through time." The sexuality of the body is in reality the result of the heterosexual imperative imposed over time so that it only appears as a boundary we call matter. Bodies themselves are hermeneutically neutral (Butler, *Bodies That Matter* [New York: Routledge, 1993], xii, xix). Along with Butler, see also Elizabeth V. Spelman, *Inessential Woman: Problems of Exclusion in Feminist Thought* (Boston: Beacon, 1988).

[21] See Gerl-Falkovitz's discussion of the West's cult of individualism driving the elimination of male and female categories of difference ("Gender Difference," 8).

[22] After chronicling the intellectual history of the "waves" of feminism, Favale concludes we are at a profound moment of "disembodiment" because of the limits that a sexed body places upon the expressive desires of the

1.5. Summary

From its earliest days, the feminist movement has pursued social equality with men by the promotion of women's essential similarity to men. Differences, even biological ones, are too easy to secund to the essentialist fallacy, therefore essentialism is treated as a dangerous and even unwanted contributor to society's disenfranchising of gender stereotypes. The radical postmodern turn of the last twenty years goes so far as to eliminate the objectivity of the body and what that might mean for the constitution of human identity. This is the new essentialism. Difference is utterly defined away from traditional categories and now left to the domain of the individual's imagination and desire. We turn next to the biblical response and understanding of human essentialism.

2. The Body of Difference

The Christian tradition interfaces most profoundly with the new essentialism of postmodernity precisely at the place of the human body. This is why social commentators like Carl Trueman consider that the Church's current struggle for the Christian worldview is in essence the "battle for the body."[23] In this second part we will consider the theology of the body and the foundations it provides for other dimensions of the biblical approach to human gender difference.

2.1. Essentialism of the Body

In the biblical tradition, the human body is one of the basic and irreducible components of human identity. This is because the inner and outer person exist together, identifying us, as Genesis 2:7 reveals, as ensouled bodies: "Then the Lord God formed man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man become a living being" (NASB).[24] Further, in Genesis 1:26–27, it is this dualistic composite of body and soul that separates human beings from all other embodied creatures as God's own earthly representatives, i.e., his image.[25] And while God delights in both the human body and the human soul equally, in Scripture this union is not one in which body and soul coexist juxtaposed. The body is not the material "shell" of the soul. The church encountered this kind of platonic dualism long ago in the struggle with Gnosticism.[26] However, by many counts, the gnostic challenge continues

soul (Favale, *Genesis of Gender*, 83). The notice here of "waves" or stages of feminist thought should not be taken as monolithic movements where later "stages" replace earlier ones. Anti-essentialist and essentialist feminisms remain in tension with neither viewpoint winning the day (Storkey, *Origins of Difference*, 23). See also here, Mark S. McLeod-Harrison, "Christian Feminism, Gender, and Human Essences: Toward a Solution to the Sameness and Difference Dilemma," *Forum Philosophicum* 19 (2014): 174–77.

[23] Carl Trueman, "The Battle for the Body," *First Things*, 21 September 2023, https://www.firstthings.com/web-exclusives/2023/09/the-battle-for-the-body.

[24] Technically, the biblical anthropology of Genesis 2:7 has the soul (נֶפֶשׁ) as the result when the physical body (עָפָר) is united with the animating and quickening spirit (נִשְׁמַת חַיִּים). I use soul here for the immaterial dimension of human life according to the philosophical tradition.

[25] As God's image, humans are his representatives to the creation for its rule and blessing. Personal attributes like conscience, freedom, spirituality, and reason should be seen as capacities enabling our representation rather than elements defining the image. See Ryan Peterson, "The Image of God: Human Identity in the Cosmic Temple," in *Essays on Creation, Covenant, and Context in Honor of John H. Walton* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2020), 90.

[26] Although the discoveries at Nag Hammadi showed ancient Gnosticism to be a more diverse ideology than typically reflected in its adversaries, a feature of the "common core" to all versions includes a dualism whereby "the essential core of the human being comes from the divine world of light and peace and must return to it, but

today particularly in the similarity agenda of feminism and even more so transgenderism.[27] Like ancient Gnostics, modern ones are "confused about what it means to be a human person in a body."[28] They despise the body for any revelation of human identity—the real person of the mind submits the body to medication and surgery according to its own desires and imaginations.

By contrast, the Christian tradition affirms a *holistic* dualism, that human beings are a hylomorphic, psychosomatic composite of body and soul.[29] Holistic dualism negotiates the Scriptural tensions where the person—the "I"—can stand apart from their body and present it to the Lord (Rom 12:1, cf. also 1 Cor 9:27), and at the same time assert that "I am my body." To do something against the body is to do it against the person.[30] Moreover, this tradition also asserts that this holistic, spirit-matter composite means that the body is unique and matches the soul. Put me in a different body, says Gregg Allison, and you would not know me.[31] It also shows that persons are created for relationship with other persons. As Karl Lehmann has observed, humans are "a personal otherness and relatedness, … indispensably linked" to one another.[32]

In Scripture, this body-level difference also establishes a complementary asymmetry between men and women that is intended by God to serve them in their mutual calling as his image. The body tells us that the common vocation men and women share of being fruitful, multiplying, filling, ruling, and

is held captive in the material world, in which it has been entrapped" (Roelf van den Broeck, *Gnostic Religion in Antiquity* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013], 2; cf. also Grabowski, *Unraveling Gender*, 111). Tertullian's "*caro salutis cardo"* doctrine (the flesh is the hinge of salvation) was an elegant apologetic counter to gnostic Neo-platonic dualism of this kind. The incarnation, passion, and resurrection of Christ's body makes flesh the very instrument of salvation (Grabowski*, Unraveling Gender*, 107–11).

[27] Feminism's similarity doctrine defines real human identity primarily or even solely in the invisible dimension of the mind (Grabowski, *Unraveling Gender*, 115; Coles, "New Feminism," 59). According to Favale, "feminist theory is saturated with dualism" (Favale, *Genesis of Gender*, 111).

[28] Favale, *Genesis of Gender,* 141; Grabowski, *Unraveling Gender*, 115.

[29] In the theology of Thomas Aquinas, hylomorphism (from Gk. ὕλη, matter, and μορφή, form), means human beings are not soul alone or body alone, but a composite of both. Different versions of hylomorphism exist concerning the primacy of the soul in the union, but the end for all, according to Robert S. Smith, is "that embodiment is basic to human ontology" ("Body, Soul, and Gender: Thinking Theologically about Human Constitution," *Eikon* 3.2 [2021]: 33). Augustine, Luther, and Calvin all believed sexuality/gender was fundamental to human life (Christopher Roberts, *Creation and Covenant: The Significance of Sexual Difference in and for the Moral Theology of Marriage* [New York: T&T Clark, 2007], 8).

[30] Israel's legal code, and ours too, makes this clear. Augustine's thoughts on the essential embodiment of human nature are rather frank: "The whole human nature includes spirit, soul, and body; anyone who tries to alienate the body from human nature is out of his mind" (quisquis ergo a natura humana corpus alienare vult, desipit). *De natura et origine animae* 2.3.

[31] Allison, "Theology of Human Embodiment," 72.

[32] Karl Lehmann, "The Place of Woman as a Problem in Theological Anthropology," *Communio* 10.3 (1983): 234; cited by Michele M. Schumacher, "The Nature of Nature in Feminism, Old and New," in *Women in Christ*, 40; cf. also Favale, *Genesis of Gender*, 40, 199, and the essays in Welker, ed., *The Depth of the Human Person* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014). John Paul II's concept of "original solitude" underscores the physical body's role in revealing the Man's personal rationality and relationality. Even before Eve's differently embodied person was revealed, it was by the physical means of his body that Adam experienced his solitude in the dissimilarity of his body with the bodies of animals. He is a person through his body and learns his capacity for relationship and rationality from his body (John Paul II, *Man and Woman He Created Them: A Theology of the Body* [Boston: Pauline, 2006], 152–53). On the original solitude, see also the commentary by Beth Zagrobelny Lofgren, "The Ontological Priority of Being a Body," *Journal of Moral Theology* 9.1 (2020): 159.

subduing the creation for God (Gen 1:28) is a calling that men and women equally share but grasp differently as corresponding complements.[33] Male persons are not interchangeable with female ones in that calling.[34] But is this a difference confined only to functions in human reproduction? For some, it seems so. "A woman," concludes Katie McCoy, "is a biologically female human being."[35] Others, however, also press the vocational implications of Eve's biblical identity as "the mother of all the living" (3:20), noting not just the female body's capacity for giving birth, but also its regular, cyclical sign of fertility.[36] Edith Stein, thus, speaks of the "maternal vocation" shared by all women regardless of whether they give birth or not.[37] With bodies uniquely organized to gestate and nurture life, a woman has a propensity "to receive new life that is entrusted to her, and to foster its complete and integrated flourishing."[38] Men's bodies, by contrast, indicate at the very least a "paternal" soul-vocation of securing, serving, and protecting women's maternal vocation, including also a particularly male "exteriority" and expendability.[39]

2.2. Essentialism of Persons in Relationship

The complementary, relational essentialism signified by the human body is made more explicit in Scripture's approach to differences through the personal relationships men and women have with each other. As we have seen, because we are made in God's image, human life is a differently embodied life of

[33] For a history of intellectual reflection upon the complementary nature of men and women, including the place of Aquinas's hylomorphism, see Prudence Allen, *The Concept of Woman: Volume III: The Search for Communion of Persons, 1500–2015* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016), esp., 16–18, 362–88, 416–41, 462–67, and the concluding section, "The Chronic Vigor of the Integral Complementarity of Woman and Man," 501–3.

[34] This is where the human "image that is like" God stands over and above the animals. Animal bodies do not reveal male and female animal persons, but human bodies do show male and female human persons.

[35] Katie McCoy, "What is a Woman? God's Intent for Sex and Gender," *The Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission*, 6 June 2022, https://erlc.com/resource-library/articles/what-is-a-woman/; Gregg Allison, "What is a Man? Looking at a Historical, Contemporary, and Essential Answer," *The Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission,* 6 June 2022, https://erlc.com/research/what-is-a-man/.

[36] Parallel to Eve's name in the biblical text would also be the divinely located place of sin's impact recorded in Genesis 3:16–19. She will experience sin's chaos directly in her maternal vocation as he will in his paternal vocation (Claus Westermann, *Genesis 1–11*, CC [Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1984], 262).

[37] See Stein's *Essays on Women*, 2nd ed., trans. Freda Mary Oben (Washington, DC: ICS, 1996), 59–85.

[38] Allen, *Concept of Woman,* 501. Elizabeth Fox-Genovese describes this unique female vocation as "a special affinity for connection" (Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, "Equality, Difference, and the Practical Problems of a New Feminism," in *Women in Christ*, 307). Gress describes the maternal vocation under the metaphors of "birthing," "nourishing," and "holding" (Gress, *End of Woman*, 180–82).

[39] See here, Christian Raab, "In Search of the Masculine Genius: The Contribution of Walter J. Ong," *Logos* 21.1 (2018): 83–117, and Deborah Savage, "The Genius of Man," in *Promise and Challenge: Catholic Women Reflect on Feminism, Complementarity, and the Church*, ed. Mary Rice Hasson (Huntington, IN: OSV, 2015), 129–53. For Jewish traditional reflection upon the different spirituality of male and females, see Yisrael Ben Reuven, *Male and Female He Created Them: A Guide to Classical Torah Commentary on the Roles and Natures of Men and Women* (Southfield, MI: Targum, 1995), 131–56. The claim for maternal and paternal vocations is not unlike Carol Gilligan's claim for a different "voice" for women from men, except her research is a project of psychology and is not specifically linked to the male and female bodies. Both approaches have support in brain science. See Louann Brizendine's, *The Male Brain* (New York: Three Rivers, 2010), *The Female Brain* (New York: Broadway, 2006), J. Richard Udry, "Biological Limits of Gender Construction," *American Sociological Review* 65.3 (2000): 443–57, and recently, Katie McCoy, *To Be a Woman: The Confusion Over Female Identity and How Christians Can Respond* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2023). There are male and female "patterns" hardwired into our brains from birth. Raab's work, cited above, specifically engages Brizendine's findings.

persons intended for communion. It is in this context of our personal communion that Scripture moves to define the difference of manhood and womanhood in terms of each one's behavior toward the other. Manhood, in this sense, is about what men do for women, and womanhood about what women do for men. Thus, as Sam Andreades and others note, womanhood is a very masculine affair and manhood a very feminine one.[40] Not only does this approach move human relationality to the forefront of a biblical essentialism, but it also betters the essentialist strategy intrinsic to the rationalistic and scientific mentality of Western cultures. These approaches divide and isolate men from women and tend to make gender difference subject to contextualized cultural stereotypes like preference in sports, food, number of words spoken, gesture habits, facial expressiveness, etc. Such essentialism always leaves "outliers," who do not fit the prescribed "list" of stereotypical gender essentials. But when difference is a matter of the clear imperatives addressed to men and women, no one is left out.

The biblical contours for its relational essentialism begin in Genesis 1–2, which lay the foundation for the other consistently asymmetrical gender imperatives that appear throughout Scripture. Alongside the undeniable equality of male and female embodied souls, Genesis 1–3 records an androcentric asymmetry for the man and the woman in terms of their order, origin, and mission.[41] This asymmetry grounds later Old Testament patricentrism and the New Testament authors' imperatives governing the relationship of men and women in home and church.[42] Thus, "ordering under" and headship language appears asymmetrically for both men and women in Ephesians 5:21–25 and 1 Corinthians 11:3.[43] In regard to the activities of prophesying, judging prophesies (1 Cor 11, 14), and authoritative teaching (1 Tim 2:11–15), distinctions are asymmetrically assigned because the man was created first (1 Tim 2:13) and because "he was not made for her sake, but she was made for his" (1 Cor 11:8). Likewise, the occupants of the final accountable church office of elder/bishop/pastor come in asymmetrical fashion

[40] Sam A. Andreades, *EnGendered: God's Gift of Gender Difference in Relationship* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2015), 51; cf. also Karl Barth: "It is always in relationship to their opposite that man and woman are what they are in themselves…. Relationship to woman … makes the man a man, and her relationship to man … makes the woman a woman" (*Church Dogmatics*, ed. G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance [Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1965–1975], III/4:163), and Miroslav Volf: "Men's identity is not and cannot be only men's affair, just as women's identity is not and cannot be only women's affair. Gender identities are essentially related and therefore the specific wholeness of each can be achieved only through the relation to the other, a relation that neither neutralizes nor synthesizes the two, but negotiates the identity of each by readjusting it to the identity of the other" ("The Trinity and Gender Identity," in *The Gospel and Gender: A Trinitarian Engagement with Being Male and Female in Christ*, ed. Douglas A. Campbell [London: T&T Clark, 2003], 173).

[41] See D. J. A. Clines' account of the androcentrism of Genesis 1–3 in the first chapter ("What Does Eve Do to Help? And Other Irredeemably Androcentric Orientations in Genesis 1–3") of *What Does Eve Do to Help? And Other Readerly Questions to The Old Testament,* JSOT Supp Ser 94 (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic Press, 1990): 25–48. Other concise accounts of this orientation include Alastair Roberts, "Man and Woman in Creation (Genesis 1 and 2)," *9Marks*, 10 December 2019, https://www.9marks.org/article/man-and-woman-in-creation-genesis-1-and-2/, and Sharon James, *God's Design for Women*, 83–105.

[42] "Patricentrism" is preferred to "patriarchy" in the OT, because, as Daniel Block notes, "the Old Testament pays relatively little attention to the power of husband and father," but rather focuses on the responsibility to serve the interests of those who are led. The head of the family is to inspire confidence, security, and trust, and not to serve a self-interested privilege and power (Daniel I. Block, "Marriage and Family in Ancient Israel," in *Marriage and Family in the Biblical World*, ed. Ken M. Campbell [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003], 41–44).

[43] Even within the mutual submission Christians owe one another (Eph 5:21) or the different meanings proposed for "head" (κεφαλή, source/origin, chief/preeminent), a husband is never called to order himself under his wife the way she is exhorted to do so to him. Neither is she, also, ever called his "head."

(1 Tim 3:1–7; Titus 1:6–9).[44] Of course, the interpretation and application of all these asymmetries as abiding statements have been hotly contested within evangelicalism for the last 50 years. Nonetheless, they do comprise a significant part of the biblical text for a relational essentialism. Gender differences exist and should even be publicly secured.[45]

2.3. Summary

In the biblical tradition, differently sexed bodies reflect differently sexed persons. In the image of God, women and men are created individually and personally to reflect a differentiated equality before God and the rest of the created order. The differences that are displayed visibly in human sex dimorphism are also matched with consistent imperatives in Scripture that support the essentialism of the body at the point of personal relationship. This holistic dualism of human nature in relationship displays Scripture's essentialist vision for a differentiated, complementary union designed to effectively provide for human flourishing and mission in the world. Thus, loss of difference weakens humanity's reflection of God's own differentiated equality, the richness of human relationships, and the effectiveness of humanity's mission as God's stewards of the creation.

3. The Future of Difference

It remains for us to assess the current evangelical options for gender essentialism against the wider culture's anti- and de-essentialist narratives. And while there are other futures predicted within the culture and the church, including a trajectory toward androgyny and other ventures to completely eliminate gender difference, my assessment will focus on the two primary, conservative evangelical options, popularly labeled egalitarianism and complementarianism.[46] What does the biblical picture of

[44] Within the many leadership functions women hold in Scripture, including prophets (Acts 21:9), deacons and teachers (1 Tim 3:11, Titus 2:14), and fellow ministers and co-laborers with the apostles (Rom 16:1, 3, 7), only men are ever associated in the NT with the pastor/elder/bishop function of ultimate church leadership.

[45] The visible distinction of male and female differences is contextually realized in Israel's Torah with the proscription against wearing the other gender's clothing (Deut 22:5) and in the NT where wives' order toward their husband is to be visible in the church's gatherings (1 Cor 11:1–16). See Graham Beynon and Jane Tooher, *Embracing Complementarianism: Turning Biblical Convictions into a Positive Church Culture* (Charlotte, NC: The Good Book, 2022), 77–78.

[46] A concise expression of egalitarianism, and by extension complementarianism, is offered in terms of sexual difference by the editors of *Discovering Biblical Equality*: "The sexual differences that exist between men and women do not justify granting men unique and perpetual prerogatives of leadership and authority that are not shared by women. Biblical equality denies that there is any created or otherwise God-ordained hierarchy *based solely* on sexual difference" (Ronald W. Pierce, Cynthia Westfall Long, and Christa McKirland, eds., *Discovering Biblical Equality*, 3rd ed. [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2021], 2, emphasis theirs). Peter Jones has made a compelling case for androgyny as the "pagan" ideal ascendant in the culture (Peter Jones, "Androgyny: The Pagan Sexual Ideal," *JETS* 43.3 [2000]: 443–69). Other recent approaches call for the church to move beyond sexual difference/dimorphism as the best means of eliminating misogyny or as care for intersex individuals. A sampling includes Adrian Thatcher's *Redeeming Gender* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016); Susannah Cornwall, ed., *Intersex, Theology, and the Bible: Troubling Bodies in Church, Text, and Society* (New York: Macmillan, 2015); Gerard Loughlin, "Gender Ideology: For a 'Third Sex' Without Reserve," *Studies in Christian Ethics,* 31.4 (2018): 471–82; Megan DeFranza, *Sex Differences in Christian Theology: Male, Female and Intersex in the Image of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015); and James K. Beilby and Paul Rhodes Eddy, eds., *Understanding Transgender Identities: Four Views* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2019), 164–97. Some, like McLeod-Harrison, propose

gender essentialism and gender difference, offered in part 2, look like for these option, in contrast with the culture's radical dualism and pursuit of radical similarity?

3.1. Egalitarian Essentialisms

At the outset, it is important to note that egalitarianism offers a constructive voice against an essentialist fallacy within the evangelical gender conversation. This is a fallacy that too easily conflates gender vocations with stereotypical social roles.[47] As John Grabowski and others of the so-called New Feminism aptly note, gender vocations and social roles are different. The female vocation as life-nurturer, for example, has more applications in society than stay-at-home mom![48] The version of the essentialist fallacy, sometimes seen in complementarian arguments, is also outside of the Bible's approach as we have already seen. It may indeed be reasonable and legitimate to suppose psychological and spiritual differences in the different "voices" of male and female persons, but Scripture's essentialism does not begin there. It is in the holistic union of sexually dimorphic bodies and persons-in-relation that manhood and womanhood are differentiated, not in psychological or temperamental traits, however prominently they may be expressed in a culture.[49]

Beyond its positive contribution, however, egalitarianism appears to possess two liabilities for biblical essentialism before the culture's anti- or de-essentialist approach to gender. First, with its principal project to exegetically eliminate all alleged patriarchy and hierarchy from the biblical texts, it, like its secular contemporaries, is left with a positive message only of gender similarity. Sharon James's complaint about a vacuum of positive teaching about manhood and womanhood in the second edition of *Discovering Biblical Equality* (*DBE*) still applies to the recent third edition and to the egalitarian movement as a whole.[50] For instance, Elizabeth Hall's essay—one of the two essays in the third edition of *DBE* specifically devoted to the question of essentialism—begins with promising questions: "What does it mean to be a man? What does it mean to be a woman? What is masculinity and femininity? What

"eternal androgyny," where gender differences remain as part of the created order but disappear in the eternal one (McLeod-Harrison, "Christian Feminism, Gender, and Human Essence," 190).

[47] The new essays in the third edition of *Discovering Biblical Equality* that address essentialism both register a concern with traditional, culturally contextualized roles (Christa McKirland, "The Image of God and Divine Presence: A Critique of Gender Essentialism," in *Discovering Biblical Equality*, 287). Elizabeth Hall's essay exposes complementarian essentialist fallacies but also rejects any essentialism based in the asymmetries of Scripture's prescribed gender behavior advocated by Andreades (and others cited above in part 2, cf. n. 40) because it reinforces "stereotypical gender characteristics" (Hall, "Gender Differences and Biblical Interpretation: A View from the Social Sciences," *Discovering Biblical Equality*, 469 n. 50).

[48] Grabowski, *Unraveling Gender*, 155–56, and Fox-Genovese, "Equality, Difference, and the Practical Problems of a New Feminism," 309.

[49] The Bible has two places that might contribute this way, however. Manhood is described by the assumption of risk, or having courage (1 Cor 16:13, ἀνδρίζομαι), and faithful vigilance and steadfastness to see and discharge all of the king's duties (1 Kings 2:2). Biblical descriptions of God's fatherhood and, metaphorically, his mothering also add dimensions to human masculine and feminine natures. J. I. Packer's classic, *Knowing God*, summarizes the meaning of God's fatherhood (in John's Gospel) with the concepts of authority, affection, fellowship, and honor (*Knowing God* [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2011], 295–96). Mothering metaphors for God, Christ, and the Spirit include a mother carrying her unborn child, birthing her child, nursing her child, and nurturing her weaned child (Ronald W. Pierce and Erin M. Heim, "Biblical Images of God as Mother and Spiritual Formation," in *Discovering Biblical Equality*, 379–91).

[50] Sharon James, et al., "Biblical Truth and Biblical Equality: A Review Article on Two Recent Books by IVP," *EvQ* 78.1 (2006): 80.

are the differences between men and women?" But it ends up, in the words of the editors, recounting only "the scant evidence for gender complementarity in the social sciences."[51] To be sure, there is not a wholesale denial of male-female difference within egalitarianism. Many egalitarians, like Elaine Storkey, for example, claim the reality of gender differences, even complementarity for those differences, but end up only by affirming what those complementary differences *cannot* mean; namely, hierarchy.[52] Likewise, many of the contributors to *DBE* (third edition) affirm women's retention of "femininity" within the functional interchangeability with men their position advances, but again they offer no specific content as to its meaning. As such, "femininity" reduces to the domain of preferred stereotypes, social constructs, and relativist community narratives, just as they do for the post-moderns in our midst.[53]

Second, while it is important to note that, unlike the wider culture, no one in evangelical egalitarianism is seeking to cancel the male-female "binary," the keen interest to stave off traditional role stereotypes mutes the personal differences located in differently sexed human bodies. In a pattern of dualism that is thoroughly synchronized to feminist convictions since Mary Wollstonecraft, egalitarianism shades embodied human difference by relentlessly focusing on a similarity doctrine at the point of the invisible soul.[54] Efforts to locate and highlight functional gender sameness in the believer's identity "in Christ," as children of God, as those born of the Spirit and Spirit-gifted, as members of the New Covenant, within the priesthood of believers—which of course are biblical identities—are never taken up with the dimension of personal differentiation located in the body. There is no holistic, embodied, complementary gender reality to any of these identities in egalitarianism. Contributors to the most recent edition of *DBE* appear to take this even a step further by now denying the male/female body as having any significance for understanding identity in the image of God and affirming how scant the evidence is for complementarity in the social sciences noted above.[55] Unfortunately, this hesitation with difference leaves egalitarians at best silent or at worst open to the charge of complicity with a culture that is surging dangerously out of step with biblical norms.[56] In the current "battle for the body," egalitarians appear to have little positive to offer.

[51] Pierce, Long, and McKirland, eds., *Discovering Biblical Equality*, 9.

[52] Storkey concludes her work with four paradigms for gender difference: 1) There is difference—Eve is not the same as Adam; 2) There is sameness—men and women are both human and therefore share more in common than they are in difference; 3) There is complementarity—men and women "fit" each other in correlation and reciprocity; and 4) There is union—women and men together are the image of God (Storkey, *Origins of Difference,* 129–30).

[53] Editors of *DBE* (third edition) admit that their authors are "less likely to define what 'masculine' and 'feminine' qualities are" (Pierce, Long, and McKirland, eds., *Discovering Biblical Equality,* 4).

[54] Favale says that dualism has been a huge feature of feminism from the beginning (Favale, *Genesis of* Gender, 111). When difference is visibly located in the body, similarity is most easily pursued at the level of the soul.

[55] McKirland, "The Image of God and Divine Presence," 291–92, 305, and Mary Conway, "Gender in Creation and Fall," *Discovering Biblical Equality*, 38–42. McKirland states: "the Scriptures do not make maleness and femaleness central to being human, nor can particular understandings of masculinity and femininity be rigidly prescribed, since these are culturally conditioned. Scripture makes Jesus Christ central to what it means to be human, and becoming more like Christ, through the empowerment of the Spirit, is the intended *telos* of all human persons" (p. 287). Her thesis concludes for gender difference: "the Scriptures have little to say on what it means to be a man or what it means to be a woman" (p. 305). After a helpful survey of sociological meta-analyses regarding psychological traits, Hall's essay concludes by describing her own view that "sees current gender differences largely as a result of the fall" (Hall, "Gender Differences and Biblical Interpretation," 470).

[56] Francis Schaeffer prophetically warned in 1968 that the culture's sanctioning of homosexuality would lead to the "obliteration of the distinction between man and woman" (Francis A. Schaeffer, *The God Who Is There* [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1968], 39). In another new essay in *DBE* (third edition), Ronald Pierce

3.2. Complementarian Essentialisms

While complementarians appear to be better situated to leverage the entirety of the biblical witness to gender difference, numerous liabilities of application limit the message for our cultural moment. Living out "equal but different" is easier said than done, especially in Western culture, which, as Nancy Miller rightly notes, "has proven to be incapable of thinking 'not-the-same-as' without assigning one of the terms a positive value and the other a negative."[57] And as this cultural context has pushed egalitarians to define equality as an interchangeable, functional sameness, it pushes many complementarians toward a "male culture" reality or worse.[58] Here "male culture" largely entails missing a key distinctive of biblical essentialism; namely, Scripture's larger context of inclusion, unity, and complement-in-relationship. Graham Beynon and Jane Tooher, with other recent voices, chart four complementarian missteps of this order in the life of the church: (1) separatism—the siloing of men's and women's ministries; (2) focusing solely on authority "boundaries" in questions of what women cannot do; (3) de-contextualization—a gender discussion extracted from the nature of the church as a diverse but unified body and spiritual family; and (4) individualism—I-thinking, rather than we-thinking.[59]

In the face of such a diagnosis, the remedy appears to require broader thinking and messaging within the complementarian camp, not just about how to encourage the ministry of women, but also about the nature of the church, leadership, and ministry in general. Is ministry just preaching the word on Sunday mornings? Does the service of elders operate like that of a CEO with top-down values associated with "position, line management, public profile, financial oversight, formal authority, and salary"?[60] Is the study of doctrine just for men? Do we really pursue the contribution of all members of the body for the church to function? Does the ministry of women really count, or is our thinking

takes up the challenge of egalitarianism being the slippery slope to endorsing a homosexual agenda ("Biblical Equality and Same-Sex Marriage," *Discovering Biblical Equality*, 489–509). Pierce's argument is made on a hermeneutical level, but Schaeffer's warning is philosophical: level the difference, lose the binary.

[57] Nancy K. Miller, "Toward New Criteria of Relevance," cited by Jardin, "Prelude," xxv.

[58] Worse would be the recent return of a "proud patriarchalism," advocated by some. See https://youtu.be/mXUiM0OE324?si=dkVSEMXUt-MZuX4i. Egalitarian "sameness equality" is well-represented by Rebecca Groothuis's essay ("'Equal in Being, Unequal in Role': Challenging the Logic of Women's Subordination," *Discovering Biblical Equality*, 393–428). Equality without sameness is a logical impossibility and also entails inferiority, in her view. Differentiated equality, however, appears as a biblical option in the relationships of the Trinity, men and women, racial differences, and gifts of the Spirit in the Church. For an account of the origins of Western notions of equality and their anachronism for reading Scripture, see John H. Elliot, "Jesus Was Not an Egalitarian: A Critique of an Anachronistic and Idealist Theory," *BTB* 32 (2002): 75–91.

[59] *Embracing Complementarianism*, 13–17, 35. See also Lee-Barnewall (*Neither Complementarian nor Egalitarian*), Rachel Green Miller (*Beyond Authority and Submission: Women and Men in Marriage, Church and Society* [Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2019]), and Rebecca McLaughlin (*The Secular Creed: Engaging Five Contemporary Claims* [Austin: The Gospel Coalition, 2021], 63–82). The irony of individualism appearing in this list for complementarians is that individualism is usually laid at the door of feminists according to Fox-Genovese: "The premises of individualism, with their emphasis upon autonomy, independence, and self-determination, have made it virtually impossible to imagine an equality grounded in difference, with the result that feminists who seek equality for women have almost invariably been led to deny or abstract from sexual difference" (Fox-Genovese, "Equality, Difference, and the Practical Problems of a New Feminism," 302–3; also Gerl-Falkovitz, "Gender Difference," 8).

[60] Andrew Wilson, "Beautiful Difference: The (Whole-Bible) Complementarity of Male and Female," *The Gospel Coalition*, 20 May 2021, https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/beautiful-complementarity-male-female. Wilson also notes how the "church-corporation" makes saying women cannot be elders sound like they cannot be CEOs, when in fact it is really saying women cannot be spiritual fathers (and men cannot be spiritual mothers)!

here dominated only by limits—what they cannot do?[61] Are women expected to be just "different men" and to censor their issues or attitudes to be taken seriously?[62] How will the church family hear and honor the voice of its spiritual mothers while visibly honoring biblical, complementary difference?[63] Evangelical complementarians need to do all they can to avoid the trap, identified by Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, of unilaterally "seeing women as fit only for motherhood and service to others."[64] A "new feminism," which is what Fox-Genovese calls her brand of complementarianism, "must encompass and honor vocations for single women, just as it must support the distinct vocations of women who are wives and mothers."[65] As the theological discipline of doctrinal criticism cautions us, it is all too easy for denominations, theological systems and movements to be defined by the social and historical context of their origin.[66] Evangelical complementarians may need to take stock and consider how their application of the difference texts of Scripture has been shaped by the context of the mid-twentieth century feminist revolt against women's traditional domestication and motherhood. The Bible, of course, has no time for any disparaging of motherhood, which is only everywhere praised and honored. But is that the extent of the message? In a day when there is growing evidence that the culture's individualism and feminism is *separating* the sexes from one another, a robust portrayal of gender difference within the Bible's message of inclusion, other-promotion, and complementary union gives the Church an effective antidote that must be leveraged.[67]

3.3. Summary

The two sides of the evangelical gender conversation uniquely refract the proposed biblical essentialism of part 2. Egalitarianism does well to shift the conversation away from culturally captive stereotyping and essentialist fallacies but also significantly weakens a biblical message for gender difference in its pursuit of a gender similarity dogma drawn from its secular feminist contemporaries. Complementarians also betray a certain cultural captivity, but in a different direction. While this preferred view naturally enjoins the full biblical picture of difference, contextual forces can also limit

[61] Practically speaking, would our thoughts and praise for a church's ministry be as gender-diverse as Paul's is for the Roman church (Rom 16)?

[62] Beynon and Tooher, *Embracing Complementarianism*, 46–48; Andreades, *EnGendered*, 49.

[63] Historically, the diaconate, which is probably best seen as open to women in 1 Timothy 3:11 (e.g., John McKinley, "The Ministry of Women and the Meaning of Deacons in the Church," *Doon Theological Journal* 12 [2015]: 186–90), provided a forum for the "voice" of spiritually qualified women to be heard.

[64] Fox-Genovese, "Equality, Difference, and the Practical Problems of a New Feminism," 309.

[65] For-Genovese, "Equality, Difference, and the Practical Problems of a New Feminism," 309.

[66] According to Alister McGrath, "the discipline of *doctrinal criticism* seeks to evaluate the reliability and adequacy of the doctrinal formulations of the Christian tradition, by identifying what they purport to represent, clarifying the pressures and influences which lead to their genesis, and suggesting criteria—historical and theological—by which they may be evaluated, and, if necessary, restated" (*The Genesis of Doctrine* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997], vii).

[67] The "Barbie" movie (2023) provides a recent case in point. The final resolution after patriarchy-smashing is an egalitarian separation of the sexes by the mantra "be your best self," but one utterly devoid of relationship, collaboration, union between them. For other sources tracking the increasing competition or "gender divide" between the sexes: Brett McCracken, "How Local Churches Can Bridge a Widening Gender Divide," *The Gospel Coalition*, 14 February 2024, https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/local-churches-gender-divide, and the report of an EU-wide study that finds increasing numbers of men under thirty view themselves in competition with women ("Men Under 30 Are Less Accepting of Women's Rights," *The Telegraph*, 2 October 2022, https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2022/10/02/men-30-less-accepting-womens-rights).

complementarian applications. The beauty and the power of the biblical message for gender differences to serve relationship, union, and inclusion can too easily be bent to serve individualism and anachronism.

4. Conclusion

Against a wider cultural narrative that now thoroughly pathologizes biologically determined differences between men and women, evangelicals respond with a theological anthropology grounded in the biblical texts. In this essay, I have argued for a biblical essentialism that is both embodied and personal. The gender differences of men and women in God's created order are not only grounded in their differently sexed bodies but reflect the differentiated unity and equality of the divine persons. I have also argued that the biblical commands avoid common and culturally contrived essentialist fallacies. Fully leveraging this holistic vision of difference will be key for engaging the "culture of confusion" and the "battle for the body" we see around us every day. At the same time, as we translate the biblical message into the language of the day, we must do so without distorting it. Our own evangelical conversation on gender shows that transformation of the biblical message can happen by missteps in both exegesis and application. It also shows us how those missteps are easily shaped by cultural pressures. For egalitarians, the pressure of the culture's similarity doctrine has left only a negative half-message of what difference cannot mean. With a message of both what difference is not and also what difference is, a revisioned complementarianism that faithfully speaks about gender difference in light of Scripture's emphases, ordering, and narrative, will be better situated to strengthen the church to stand against the culture and to promote the positive flourishing of Christian women and men.

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"Ancient Gnosticism in New Garb?" Gnostic Anthropology, Transgenderism, and a Response from Tertullian

— Meagan Stedman —

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Abstract: A number of Christian scholars, such as Oliver O'Donovan and Nancy Pearcey, have compared the modern transgender movement with the ancient heresy of Gnosticism. While this comparison is a common one, it is worth evaluating its validity. Examining the early church's dialogue with gnostic thought provides valuable insights into the validity of a comparison of ancient Gnosticism with the ideas behind transgenderism. A survey of ancient gnostic sources, the work of Tertullian, and the claims of queer theory shows that such a comparison is viable when properly nuanced. Therefore, Tertullian's refutation of Gnostic thought has much to offer the contemporary church as it attempts to engage with the transgender movement.

In recent years, Christian scholars such as Oliver O'Donovan and Nancy Pearcey have compared the modern transgender movement to the ancient heresy of Gnosticism.[1] In "Transsexualism and Christian Marriage," O'Donovan states, "If I claim to have a 'real sex' which may be at war with the sex of my body and is at least in a rather uncertain relationship to it, I am shrinking from the glad acceptance of myself as a physical as well as spiritual being, and seeking self-knowledge in a kind of Gnostic withdrawal from material creation."[2] Pearcey expresses a similar sentiment in *Love Thy Body*: "Young people are absorbing the idea that the physical body is not part of the authentic self—that the authentic self is only the autonomous choosing self. This is ancient Gnosticism in new garb."[3]

While commonly made, how much validity may be ascribed to the comparison of transgenderism to ancient Gnosticism? One way of answering this question is to examine the early church's dialogue with gnostic thought. Based on a survey of ancient gnostic sources, the writings of Tertullian, the claims of Queer Theory, and modern scholarly work on transgenderism, this article argues that it is appropriate to make a nuanced comparison between the anthropology of ancient Gnosticism and that assumed by the contemporary transgender movement is an appropriate one when nuanced. I also argue

[1] Scholars such as Scott Bader Saye have critiqued this comparison. See Scott Bader Saye, "The Transgender Body's Grace," *Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics* 39 (2019): 75–92.

[2] Oliver O'Donovan, "Transsexualism and Christian Marriage," *JRE* 11 (1983): 147.

[3] Nancy Pearcey, *Love Thy Body: Answering Hard Questions about Life and Sexuality* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2018), 196.

that Tertullian's refutation of gnostic thought in particular has much to offer the contemporary church as it wrestles with "ancient Gnosticism in new garb" and attempts to distinguish orthodoxy from heresy. While one should always exhibit caution when comparing contemporary ideologies to ancient heresies, there is much from the ancient gnostic writings and the work of Tertullian that contributes valuable theological insights into contemporary dialogues about transgenderism.

1. Gnostic Anthropology

One of the most prominent characteristics of ancient Gnosticism is its anti-cosmic dualism. Many gnostic texts depict a duality between the transcendent God and the creator god, as well as a duality between God and the material world. Gnostics generally considered the material world to be created by the error of a lower "archon" or "demiurge" rather than by the good and transcendent God. This dualistic cosmology has inevitable implications for gnostic anthropology. For, as Kurt Rudolph notes, "The world is the product of a divine tragedy, a disharmony in the realm of God, a baleful destiny in which man is entangled and from which he must be set free."[4]

1.1. The Role of the Body and Androgyny in Gnostic Anthropology

Due to this dualism, many gnostic texts depict a sharp distinction between the material self and the spiritual self. The "true" person or "inner man" is not only distinguished from but pitted against the body in which he is enclosed. While exceptions can be found, this characteristic consistently manifests itself in a variety of gnostic texts, many of which will be surveyed below.[5]

The *Apocryphon of John,* for example, depicts the first perfect human as an immaterial being. In this text, the rest of humanity is supposedly created by a lower archon named Yaldabaoth, who forms mankind in both the image of God and the image of the lower archons. Humans are seen as a convergence of divine and human, with the body supplied by the lower archons while still reflecting the first human.[6] In accord with this view, The *Gospel of Thomas* quotes Jesus as saying, "If spirit came into being because of the body, it is a marvel of marvels. Indeed I am amazed at how this great wealth has come to dwell in this poverty."[7] The *Gospel of Phillip* displays a similar attitude, describing the soul as a "precious thing" that dwells in a "worthless body."[8] In short, many gnostic texts exhibit a disparaging view of the body, calling it a "prison" and associating it with beastly nature.[9]

[4] Many scholars caution against over-generalization of gnostic cosmic dualism. Michael Williams argues that gnostic "hatred" of the material world is overstated. Some gnostic texts and schools display this trait more than others. There is evidence for a cautious and nuanced continuation of this general theme. See *Rethinking "Gnosticism": An Argument for Dismantling a Dubious Category* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001) and Karen King, *What Is Gnosticism?* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003).

[5] The purpose of this article is not to discuss the validity of "Gnosticism" as a category or to draw sharp distinctions between types of Gnosticism. The texts cited below have sufficient scholarly support to be considered "gnostic," even if debates exist. The characterizations given of Gnosticism are general ones, with the acknowledgement that there are exceptions to these general observations and themes.

[6] *The Secret Book of John* 15.

[7] *The Gospel of Thomas* 29.

[8] *The Gospel of Phillip* 56:20–26.

[9] Williams, *Rethinking Gnosticism,* 116.

Gnostics generally considered the body to be inevitably fated to destruction. Thus, the *Apocryphon of James* seems to affirm that the body is not the self and that only the soul is capable of salvation.[10] The Valentinians possessed a tripartite anthropology that resulted in three classes of person: the spiritual, the animal (or psychical), and the material. Spiritual persons were guaranteed salvation, while those with an animal nature had hopes of salvation. Material persons, however, were guaranteed destruction.[11] The gnostic disparagement of the body often results in a disparaging view of sex and procreation. The *Apocryphon of John* depicts the desire for sex as something implanted in Adam and Eve by the lower archon, Yaldabaoth, in order to increase their misery. Intercourse was sometimes seen by Gnostics as a subhuman or beastly use of the body.[12] A frequent component of gnostic salvation is a liberation of the self from one's material confines and its reintegration with heavenly reality.[13]

The devaluation of the material body led some Gnostics to depict humanity as an originally androgynous or asexual creation.[14] Irenaeus argues that the Gnostics interpreted the Genesis narrative in such a way that "man was formed after the image and likeness of God, masculo-feminine, and that this was the spiritual man; and that another man was formed out of the earth."[15] Hippolytus argues that a sect called the Naassenes also perceived the original human to be masculo-feminine, describing their origin-myth in the following way:

> For the Naassene says, there is the hermaphrodite man. According to this account of theirs, the intercourse of woman with man is demonstrated, in conformity with such teaching, to be an exceedingly wicked and filthy (practice). For, says (the Naassene), Attis has been emasculated, that is, he has passed over from the earthly parts of the nether world to the everlasting substance above, where, he says, there is neither female or male, but a new creature, a new man, which is hermaphrodite.[16]

The Naassenes supposedly argued that one should strive to reach the ungendered state of the spiritual human. While it is not always possible to verify the accuracy of accounts provided by the heresiologists of the early church, the theme of an original or ideal androgyny seems to be present in many gnostic texts. Summarizing this gnostic theme, Jonathan Cahana states: "This is a recurrent theme found in most, if not all, gnostic writings: the original perfect human, or *anthropos,* is neither gendered nor sexed, and gender is the creation of an evil, inferior, and overly masculine god whose purpose is to delude humankind lest they recognize their heavenly origin."[17] The sexed state of human beings is seen as something that humans are subjected to by an inferior god. Accordingly, salvation is often conceived of as a return to androgyny.

The *Gospel of Thomas* also exhibits this androgyne theme, indicating that a person who is truly spiritual will transcend and renounce "the enslaving life and divisive categories of sexuality."[18] Moreover,

[10] *The Apocryphon of James* 11:6–12:17.

[11] Tertullian, *Against the Valentinians* 26 (*ANF* 3:516). See also *The Tripartite Tractate* 104:18–106:25, 118:14–122:12.

[12] Williams, *Rethinking Gnosticism,* 12, 122.

[13] Kurt Rudolph, *Gnosis: The Nature and History of Gnosticism* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987), 91.

[14] Elaine Pagels, *The Gnostic Gospels* (New York: Random House, 1979), 56–57.

[15] Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 1.18.2.

[16] Hippolytus of Rome, *The Refutation of All Heresies* (Pickerington, OH: Beloved, 2016), 57.

[17] Jonathan Cahana, "Gnostically Queer: Gender Trouble in Gnosticism," *BTB* 41 (2011): 30.

[18] Marvin Meyer, "Making Mary Male: The Categories of Male and Female in the Gospel of Thomas," *NTS* 31 (2009): 561.

the gnostic aversion to the material realm often resulted in a particular opposition to "femaleness," due to the female association with the natural processes of procreation and intercourse.[19] Women are therefore depicted as having to transcend their biological sex in order to be saved. This is seen in the (supposed) words of Jesus regarding Mary Magdalene that conclude the *Gospel of Thomas*: "Look, I shall guide her to make her male, so that she too may become a living spirit resembling you males. For every female who makes herself male will enter heaven's kingdom."[20] While there are various interpretations to this passage, it is clear that femaleness is something that women need to surpass.[21] However, earlier in the text Jesus is recorded as saying: "when you make … the male and the female into a single one, so that the male will not be male nor the female be female, … then you shall enter [the kingdom]."[22] While this is, again, an opaque saying, it seems to suggest that the properly spiritual person is one who transcends their sex and their enslavement to the divisive categories of male and female.

In presenting such a picture, both protological and eschatological, the *Gospel of Thomas* is not alone; the theme of an original and ideal androgyny pervades many gnostic texts. The *Apocryphon of John*, for example, contains a similar emphasis on an originally androgynous creation,[23] and according to the *Gospel of Phillip* a key component of salvation is the reunification of the sexes into their original androgynous state. In this latter text, death is also seen as the consequence of Eve's separation from Adam. Consequently, death will cease to be at their reunification.[24]

1.2. The Gnostic View of the Incarnation

The gnostic view of the material body often produced a docetic view of the person of Christ. The *Revelation of Peter* possesses one of the more prominent gnostic examples of such a Christology. It records Jesus explaining to Peter that it was not actually Jesus who was crucified; rather, his place was taken by "the substitute for him," while "the living Jesus" watched and laughed at the ignorance of the rulers.[25] The *First Revelation of James* contains similar themes, as Jesus assures James that he never suffered or was harmed; rather the one afflicted was a "figure of the rulers."[26]

However, while clear examples of Docetic Christology certainly exist in gnostic texts, Karen King points out that not all Gnostics denied Christ's bodily existence. Rather, the more consistent theme, as King identifies, is *the rejection of the body as the self*. In other words, the claim of some gnostic texts is that, although Jesus's body was crucified, it is not Jesus's *true* self that died. In the *Letter of Peter to Phillip* and the Valentinian *Treatise on the Resurrection,* it is acknowledged that Christ was truly incarnate; but his incarnation, death, and resurrection are viewed as evidence of the immortal spirit's entrapment in mortal flesh. These texts, then, accept that "the Lord truly had a physical body, truly suffered and died." The problem, however, is that this affirmation is tied to "a view that rejects the body as the self."[27]

[19] Pagels, *The Gnostic Gospels*, 66–67.

[20] *The Gospel of Thomas* 114.

[21] Daniel L. Hoffman, *The Status of Women and Gnosticism in Irenaeus and Tertullian* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen, 1995), 39.

[22] *The Gospel of Thomas* 22.

[23] *The Secret Book of John* 4:19–6:10, 23:35–30:11.

[24] *The Gospel of Philip* 68:22–26.

[25] *The Revelation of Peter* 81:3–82:3.

[26] *The First Revelation of James* 30:16–32:28.

[27] Karen King, *What Is Gnosticism?* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), 212.

1.3. Summary of Gnostic Anthropology

One of the primary themes of gnostic anthropology is that the material body is a part of a "lesser" reality, one that is not connected to the "true" self. This understanding of the human person intentionally disconnects the body from the soul, as the body (including biological sex) needs to be transcended in order to achieve salvation. In other words, the eschatological aim of Gnosticism is not a continuation or restoration or even transformation of sexed bodily existence, but a transcending of it. This view of the body results in what could be described as a docetic-leaning tendency in gnostic Christology. These themes are not present in *every* gnostic text, however, but are consistent enough to be considered general themes of gnostic anthropology.

2. The Orthodox Response: Tertullian

The leaders of early orthodox Christianity issued an emphatic rejection of the views proposed by the Gnostics. In this section, the response of Tertullian will be surveyed, as his refutation of gnostic doctrine synthesized many of the orthodox arguments.[28] While Tertullian is known for his use of caricature and misrepresentation in his arguments against heretics, his response is extremely useful in determining how the orthodox church fathers perceived the anthropology of the Gnostics and why they opposed it so strongly.

The period between 150 AD and 250 AD was a high point in the debate between the Christian church and the Gnostics, with Tertullian being one of the church's foremost representatives. In his *De Praescriptione Haereticorum,* Tertullian brings together many of the standard objections to gnostic thought.[29] One of his primary arguments is that Christian truth should rest upon Christ and his apostles alone, not upon any other philosophy or intellectual reasoning. Thus, it is in this text that we find the famous statement, "What then has Athens to do with Jerusalem, the Academy with the Church, the heretics with the Christians?"[30] Tertullian also appeals to the rule of faith, which was "taught by Christ" and affirms the one and only God as the creator of the world, the true flesh of Christ, and the promise of humanity's future bodily resurrection ("the restoration of their flesh").[31]

2.1. The Incarnation

In response to Marcion, Valentinus, and other Gnostics who denied the true humanity of Jesus, Tertullian devotes an entire treatise to a defense of the reality of Christ's body. In this text, *On the Flesh of Christ*, Tertullian refutes the notion that material existence is intrinsically unworthy of a transcendent God. Following a vivid depiction of the messiness of the birthing process, Tertullian defends the goodness of human embodiment, stating, "Christ, at any rate, has loved even that man who was condensed in his mother's womb amidst all its uncleannesses, even that man who was brought into

[28] Tertullian's response to Gnosticism is consistent with much of the discourse provided by other early orthodox leaders such as Irenaeus and Hippolytus. Tertullian is surveyed not only because of the depth of discourse that he provides but also because his viewpoint coheres with the contributions of these other church fathers. See Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* and Hippolytus, *The Refutation of All Heresies*.

[29] Rudolph, *Gnosis*, 14–15.

[30] Tertullian, *The Prescription against Heretics* 7 (*ANF* 3:246).

[31] Tertullian, *The Prescription against Heretics* 13 (ANF 3:249).

life out of the said womb," and "loving man He loved his nativity also, and his flesh as well."[32] In other words, Tertullian argues that Christ loves the *whole* man, flesh included, and that this love compelled Christ to do something as "foolish" as take on flesh. Tertullian vividly describes this reality: "*I mean* this flesh suffused with blood, built up with bones, interwoven with nerves, entwined with veins, *a flesh* which knew how to be born, and how to die, human without a doubt, as born of a human being. It will therefore be mortal in Christ, because Christ is man and the Son of man."[33] Tertullian's primary argument is that Christ loved mankind enough to take on true flesh, with its limitations, so that he might redeem both the body and soul of those he came to save.

2.2. The Resurrection of the Flesh

In his *On the Resurrection of the Flesh,* Tertullian highlights the significance of the Christian doctrine of the resurrection of the dead, asserting that "the resurrection of the dead is the Christian's trust."[34] He describes the view of the heretics as follows:

> Is not (their burden) from the beginning and everywhere an invective against the flesh—against its origin, against its substance, against the casualties and the invariable end which await it; unclean from its first formation of the dregs of the ground, uncleaner afterwards from the mire of its own seminal transmission; worthless, weak, covered with guilt, laden with misery, full of trouble, and after all this record of its degradation dropping into its original earth and the appellation of a corpse, and destined to dwindle away even from this loathsome name into none henceforth at all—into the very death of all designation?[35]

Tertullian strongly argues against such degradation of the flesh: "Let, then, the flesh begin to give you pleasure since the Creator thereof is so great."[36] His understanding of the goodness of the body is strongly tied to his understanding of the goodness of the God who created all things. The human body was intentionally formed by God, and men and women are made in God's image. The flesh's origin from the dust of the ground does not detract from its dignity as "the privilege has been granted to the flesh to be nobler than its origin."[37]

The flesh is included in God's promises to mankind, as the soul's "associate and co-heir."[38] Tertullian thus stresses the unity of the body and soul in the human person:

> And since the soul is, in consequence of its salvation, chosen to the service of God, it is the flesh which actually renders it capable of such service. The flesh, indeed is washed, in order that the soul may be cleansed; the flesh is anointed, that the soul may be consecrated; the flesh is signed (with the cross), that the soul too may be fortified; the flesh is shadowed with the imposition of hands, that the soul may be illuminated by

[32] Tertullian, *On the Flesh of Christ* 4 (*ANF* 3:524).
[33] Tertullian, *On the Flesh of Christ* 5 (*ANF* 3:525), emphasis original.
[34] Tertullian, *On the Resurrection of the Flesh* 1 (*ANF* 3:545).
[35] Tertullian, *On the Resurrection of the Flesh* 4 (*ANF* 3:548).
[36] Tertullian, *On the Resurrection of the Flesh* 5 (*ANF* 3:548).
[37] Tertullian, *On the Resurrection of the Flesh* 6 (*ANF* 3:550).
[38] Tertullian, *On the Resurrection of the Flesh* 7 (*ANF* 3:551).

> the Spirit…. They cannot then be separated in their recompense, when they are united in their service[39]

Tertullian affirms the role of the flesh in the human person, articulating a psychosomatic unity that participates in all earthly and spiritual acts. Referring to the unity of body and soul in man, he states: "Thus the designation *man* is, in a certain sense, the bond between the two closely united substances, under which designation they cannot but be coherent natures."[40] Even in the context of Tertullian's view of a corporeal nature of the soul, he argues that the soul still *needs* the flesh for perfect perception and perfect action of the person.[41] Because humans are both body and soul, it is body and soul that are saved, sanctified, and judged.

Finally, a display of God's love for the flesh is the promise that it will rise again. The flesh will not be left to destruction, as many Gnostics claimed, but will be raised along with the soul. The fatal impact of the fall on the flesh provides opportunity for God's power to be displayed in the flesh's restoration. The human body is subject to death and corruption, but these "earthen vessels" may contain the treasure of the life of Christ manifested, pointing to their own future resurrection and glory at his return.[42] Tertullian argues against those who would disparage the natural functions of the body (such as pregnancy or the consumption of food) in order to deny the resurrection, as he affirms that the resurrected body will retain its limbs and biological sex, even though it may not participate in the same earthly functions.[43] Tertullian points to Christ's session as the guarantee of the resurrection of the flesh, stating, "He keeps in His own self the deposit of the flesh which has been committed to Him by both parties [God and man]—the pledge and security of its entire perfection. For as 'he has given to us the earnest of the Spirit,' so has He received from us the earnest of the flesh, and has carried it with Him into heaven as a pledge of that complete entirety which is one day to be restored to it."[44]

2.3. Summary of the Orthodox View

From the earliest days of the church, there existed a battle to affirm the goodness of the body and its role in the human person. In light of the heretical views of the Gnostics, church fathers such as Tertullian determined from Christianity's early days that views that did not affirm the goodness of God as creator and the goodness of God's creation were outside of the bounds of orthodoxy. A denial of such views had far-reaching implications for some of the essential doctrines of the Christian faith such as the incarnation, the resurrection of Christ, and the future bodily resurrection of humanity at Christ's return. In contrast to the Gnostics, Tertullian argued that the body is an intrinsic part of the self that is unified with the soul. Tertullian affirms an interdependence of body and soul, with the body as a meaningful part of the human person. In Christian eschatology and anthropology, the aim is not to transcend the body as the Gnostics desired, but for that very body to be restored at the return of Christ.

[39] Tertullian, *On the Resurrection of the Flesh* 8 (*ANF* 3:551).
[40] Tertullian, *On the Resurrection of the Flesh* 40 (*ANF* 3:574).
[41] Tertullian, *On the Resurrection of the Flesh* 17 (*ANF* 3:557).
[42] Tertullian, *On the Resurrection of the Flesh* 44 (*ANF* 3:577).
[43] Tertullian, *On the Resurrection of the Flesh* 61 (*ANF* 3:593).
[44] Tertullian, *On the Resurrection of the Flesh* 51 (*ANF* 3:584).

3. Transgenderism and Queer Theory

Almost eighteen-hundred years after the time of Tertullian and the Gnostics, the contemporary church is dealing with its own anthropological debates, prompted by the advent of the transgender movement and the development of Queer Theory. From the onset, it must be acknowledged that transgenderism and Gnosticism find a great diversity of thought among their proponents. There is not one understanding of transgenderism nor one version of Queer Theory. Therefore, the primary characteristics of each of these aspects of the modern gender movement will be discussed.[45]

3.1. Transgenderism

The American Psychological Association defines "transgender" as "an umbrella term for persons whose gender identity, gender expression, or behavior does not conform to that typically associated with the sex to which they were assigned at birth."[46] Gender identity is generally defined as one's internal sense of whether one is a man or a woman. Those who identify as transgender, then, are usually given expression to a sense of misalignment between their biological sex and their gender identity.[47] Oliver O'Donovan conveys the transgender perspective more pointedly, stating that "the body is an accident that has befallen the real me; the real me has a true sex, male or female; and I know immediately what that true sex is without anyone needing to tell me."[48] The term "transgender" embraces many subcategories, such as "gender fluid," "genderqueer," and "nonbinary," some of which will be discussed below. Many trans-identified people take steps to align their appearance with their gender identity, with the most extreme forms including surgery. While transgender theory, or the idea that one's biological sex can be at odds with one's gender identity, emerged primarily as a response to gender dysphoria (which refers to the psychological distress produced by the experience of gender incongruence), voluntarist understandings of gender identity that reject both the sex-and-gender binary and the sex-and-gender connection are increasingly becoming more common.[49]

3.2. Judith Butler and Queer Theory

Judith Butler, who is seen by many as the founder of Queer Theory, represents well how gender ideologies have developed over the past few decades. In *Gender Trouble* (1990), Butler argues that the understanding of a binary in sex, gender, and desire, is not due to naturally occurring phenomena but to a formulation of power. She views *both* sex and gender not as "natural," but as political "productions" that only *appear* to be natural and inevitable.[50] In Butler's perspective, the sex and gender binaries

[45] It is important to recognize that this survey will not be exhaustive of every perspective in what is a diverse and still-developing movement in the modern understanding of sex, gender, and the human person.

[46] American Psychological Association, "Answers to Your Questions About Transgender People, Gender Identity, and Gender Expression" (2014), http://www.apa.org/topics/lgbt/transgender.pdf.

[47] Fraser Watts, "Transgenderism and the Church," *Theology and Sexuality* 9 (2002): 65.

[48] O'Donovan, "Transsexualism and Christian Marriage," 145–46.

[49] Voluntarist viewpoints are primarily what is being addressed in this paper. While the comparison of transgenderism and Gnosticism may still be valid with transgenderism associated with gender dysphoria, there are nuances and sensitivities that would need to be addressed that are beyond the scope of this paper. See Mark A. Yarhouse, *Understanding Gender Dysphoria: Navigating Transgender Issues in a Changing Culture* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2015) for a psychologically informed and pastoral account of gender dysphoria. Discussion of intersex conditions, which has its own unique considerations, is also beyond the scope of this paper.

[50] Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble* (New York: Routledge Classics, 2006), xxx–xxxi.

are political constructs that ought to be disrupted.[51] She states, "If the immutable character of sex is contested, perhaps this construct called 'sex' is as culturally constructed as gender; indeed perhaps it was already gender, with the consequence that the distinction between sex and gender turns out to be no distinction at all."[52] Not only does Butler view biological sex to be personally, socially, and politically constructed, but the same applies to one's internal sense of gender identity. She argues that "the very notions of an essential sex and a true or abiding masculinity or femininity are also constituted as part of the strategy that conceals gender's performative character."[53]

Butler concludes that people should reject their natural tendency towards an internal coherence of sex, gender, and sexual expression.[54] This can be done by engaging in performative acts that disrupt the categories of, and continuity between, body, sex, gender, and sexuality, and subvert the binary framework by exposing its phantasmic nature.[55] Butler is certainly advocating a "strong" form of Queer Theory, but her perspectives are slowly integrating themselves into popular consciousness.[56] The increased frequency of gender identities such as "genderqueer" or "nonbinary" reflect this integration, as both of these terms are used to describe a gender identity that is outside the gender binary.[57] The distinction between Butler's theory and the transgender theory discussed above is that Butler's view rules out any possibility of an essential gender identity. In contrast, many transgender individuals claim that they *do* have a fundamental gender identity that is simply at odds with their biological sex.[58]

The question of transgenderism is not simply a matter of Christian interaction with a secular worldview. The church is being compelled to consider whether the concepts found within transgenderism fit within a Christian framework. Scott Bader-Saye, arguing against the charge that transgenderism is inherently "gnostic," asserts that attempts to alter the body to align with one's internal conception of gender is not a denial of the body but in fact a grace-filled attempt to turn the body from an "opponent into a partner." He thus argues, "The goal of bodily transitioning for the trans person is not the punishment, torment, or destruction of the flesh but rather its metamorphosis for the sake of participating in gendered reciprocity. In this way it avoids the charge of Gnosticism."[59] Bader-Saye is correct that many advocates of transgenderism do not act out of asceticism or a hatred of embodiment as such. Consequently, most versions of transgenderism do not seem to warrant a comparison to the most extreme forms of Gnosticism. This comparison, however, warrants further consideration.

[51] Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 24

[52] Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 9–10.

[53] Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 192. There is room within Christian theology to critique the idea of an essential gender identity. Gender essentialism is an ongoing conversation in Christian theology. The discussion of this paper is concerned with understandings of identity that *completely deny* the reality or significance of biological sex, not questions regarding how to biblically understand how to live out one's biological sex.

[54] Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 23.

[55] Butler, *Gender Trouble*, xxxiv.

[56] Yarhouse, *Understanding Gender Dysphoria,* 51.

[57] J. A. Branch, *Affirming God's Image: Addressing the Transgender Question with Science and Scripture* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2019), 26–27.

[58] Bader-Saye, "The Transgender Body's Grace," 79.

[59] Bader-Saye, "The Transgender Body's Grace," 88. Bader-Saye offers an empathetic perspective towards those who experience Gender Incongruence. The purpose of the current paper is not to discuss potential actions to alleviate feelings of gender incongruence but rather to discuss the implicit and explicit ideologies involved. This discussion, however, should always take place with utmost empathy and respect.

3.3. "Gnosticism in New Garb"?

The question remains as to whether the transgender movement can be aptly described as "ancient Gnosticism in new garb." One must certainly acknowledge that there are completely different cosmologies and worldviews involved in these two movements. It is important, however, to consider whether gnostic and transgender anthropologies possess similar themes and assumptions, despite their different religious and cultural contexts. Significantly, both Gnosticism and transgenderism hold to a similar understanding of the body's relationship to the self. While Bader-Saye is correct to assert that most transgender individuals would not admit to a "hatred" of the body, there is an evident prioritization in the transgender framework. In instances of gender incongruence, proponents of the transgender movement generally argue that one should adapt or present their body in a way that accommodates the internal self at the expense of the realities of one's biological sex. Even in the proposition provided by Bader-Saye, it is assumed that the body is the opponent. Proponents of transgender theory rarely assert that the mind should be guided towards congruence with the physical realities of the body. These matters are complex, and the point of the present article is not to discuss the various methods of treating gender incongruence. In both ancient Gnosticism and contemporary transgenderism, however, it seems that there exists at least an implicit tendency to identify the body as the "lower" self or as a less meaningful part of the self. In this way, the charge that transgenderism presupposes a "gnostic" view of the person does not seem to be baseless.

Advocates of Queer Theory, following the trajectory of Judith Butler, are perhaps most reflective of the gnostic separation of the body from the true self. As we have seen, explicit in Butler's view is the assertion that the body does not possess a reality that should determine one's identity. Any who would champion a complete dismissal of the realities of biological sex are not far from the gnostic desire for an asexual transcendence of the material world. Oliver O'Donovan argues, "Self-transcendence, in which the spirit may view the body as an object for thought, has not led, as it ought, to the recognition of the body as self and the acknowledgment of self as obligated to the body's form; it has led to the reduction of the body to undifferentiated matter, on which the spirit proposes to exercise unlimited freedom."[60] This self-falsification is the natural consequence of the denial of the identity-determining significance of the material body, and it is founded upon the abolition of complementarity between body and soul in a way that is suspiciously similar to gnostic dualism. This fragmentation of body and soul in the pursuit of a transcendence of material reality possesses genuine echoes of gnostic dualism that renders valid the charges of O'Donovan and Pearcey.

4. Theological Significance and Christian Orthodoxy

Given that there is a valid comparison to be made between gnostic anthropology and the implied anthropology of transgenderism, what can the contemporary church learn from the response of the ancient church to gnostic heresy? To answer this question, it might be helpful to consider *how* the church fathers, such as Tertullian, might respond to the contemporary transgender movement. Based on Tertullian's response to Gnostic anthropology, it is likely there would be three areas of emphasis: the goodness of material creation and the human body, the unity of the human person, and the implications of bodily resurrection.

[60] O'Donovan, "Transsexualism and Christian Marriage," 151.

4.1. Affirming the Goodness of Creation

Tertullian clearly opposed the anti-material notions of the gnostic sects, as well as the docetic tendencies that stemmed from this worldview. While the comparison of gnostic anthropology and the anthropology of transgenderism is not an exact one, the orthodox conversation with gnostic thought gives the contemporary church precedent for a continued affirmation of the goodness of material creation and the physical body.

One of Tertullian's fundamental concerns with gnostic anthropology is that what one believes about the character of creation has a direct bearing upon what one believes about the character of the God who created it.[61] According to Scripture, the human body, including its existence as male and female, is the intentional creation of a good God who made men and women in his image (Gen 1:27). The goodness of creation and Creator, therefore, stand or fall together. This ancient argument of Christian orthodoxy is one that O'Donovan echoes when he states, "Together with man's essential involvement in created order and his rebellious discontent with it, we must reckon also upon the opacity and obscurity of that order to the human mind which has rejected the knowledge of its Creator."[62] A rejection of the goodness of creation and its order results from a rejection of the knowledge of its good Creator. This reality should remind the church that dialogue with many advocates of transgenderism is first and foremost a missionary encounter, as those who do not recognize the good Creator will always be limited in their ability to recognize the goodness of creation. While Christians should discuss issues of gender and sexuality with nuance and compassion, any perspective that does not also affirm the goodness of creation and the human body deviates from the church's orthodox heritage.

4.2. The Unity of the Human Person

Tertullian indicates that the body is an essential part of human personhood that should not be denied its goodness or givenness. The orthodox perspective indicates that body and soul are meant to live in coherence and unity. In fact, they do so by their very nature. The body is the body of the soul, and the soul is the soul of the body. Therefore, while the fall may affect a person's *feelings* of congruence with their body, they should not embrace an identity that denies the reality of their bodily existence. The orthodox view particularly indicates that any perspective that denies the integration of body and soul does not have a place within the realm of Christian orthodoxy. While Christians should be sympathetic toward those for whom the sex of their body is difficult to accept, the Christian belief that both body and soul are unified in the human person means that Christian theology should compassionately and boldly point to that truth. While many a trans person would claim to be motivated by a desire for unity of body and soul, it cannot be achieved through artificial manipulation of the body or denial of its realities. Rather, those with gender incongruence must accept that the body they have *already* reveals their personhood.[63]

[61] Tertullian, *On the Resurrection of the Flesh* 5.

[62] Oliver O'Donovan, *Resurrection and Moral Order: An Outline for Evangelical Ethics*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 19. This quote is not used to say that those who struggle with Gender Dysphoria or Gender Incongruence are intrinsically denying God. Rather, that those who would *champion* a view that denies the realities and goodness of God's creation are failing to recognize his goodness.

[63] Abigail Favale discusses this idea of the sacramental nature of the body, that it reveals the human person, in *Genesis of Gender: A Christian Theory* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2022), 199.

4.3. The Implications of Bodily Resurrection

Tertullian emphasizes that both the incarnation and resurrection of Christ and the future resurrection of mankind point to the goodness of the body. Christ's incarnation indicates that he came to redeem the *whole person* of one who would believe in him.[64] Christ's resurrection is the final declaration that material creation is good and worth redeeming. O'Donovan echoes the ancient sentiments of Tertullian when he says,

> It might have been possible, we could say, before Christ rose from the dead, for someone to wonder whether creation was a lost cause. If the creature consistently acted to uncreate itself, and with itself to uncreate the rest of creation, did this not mean that God's handiwork was flawed beyond hope of repair? It might have been possible before Christ rose from the dead to answer in good faith, Yes. Before God raised Jesus from the dead, the hope that we call 'gnostic', the hope *from* creation rather than for the redemption *of* creation, might have appeared to be the only possible hope. 'But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead…'[65]

The bodily resurrection of Christ, one of the core tenets of the Christian faith, is one of the strongest orthodox arguments against a "gnostic" view of creation. Elaine Pagels asserts that the orthodox doctrine of resurrection affirms bodily existence as "the central fact of human life."[66] The future resurrection of the flesh indicates that the body is a reality that will exist in eternity, albeit in a glorified state. Just as the resurrected body of Jesus remains male, so this resurrection of the body will mean the resurrection of each person as male or female. While marriage will cease in eternity, the historical understanding is that it is sexed bodies that will rise in the new creation.[67] The future restoration of the whole person at Christ's return may provide hope for those who feel at odds with their body in this life, as the soul will exist in perfect unity with its glorified body in eternity. Church fathers such as Tertullian knew that the resurrection meant creation is to be restored, not abandoned. The church today must follow suit in proclaiming the goodness of God's creation, including the sexed human body, if it is to properly communicate the hope of the resurrection.

5. Conclusion

In *Resurrection and Moral Order,* O'Donovan states, "A belief in Christian ethics is a belief that certain ethical and moral judgments belong to the gospel itself; a belief, in other words, that the church can be committed to ethics without moderating the tone of its voice as a bearer of glad tidings."[68] In some of the earliest conversations regarding orthodoxy and heresy in the Christian church, the orthodox recognized that anthropology was intimately tied to some of the core doctrines of the Christian faith. The goodness of the body and material creation was ardently affirmed by the orthodox leaders such

[64] Tertullian, *On the Flesh of Christ* 4 (*ANF* 3:524).

[65] O'Donovan, *Resurrection and Moral Order*, 14.

[66] Pagels, *The Gnostic Gospels,* 27.

[67] See Yarhouse, *Understanding Gender Dysphoria,* 44–45, O'Donovan, *Resurrection and Moral Order,* 70. There are exceptions, such as Gregory of Nyssa and Maximus the Confessor, but they are the minority. See Spyridoula Athanasopoulou-Kypriou, "The Eschatological Body: Constructing Christian Orthodox Anthropology beyond Sexual Ideology," *The Journal of Eastern Christian Studies* 69 (2017): 327.

[68] O'Donovan, *Resurrection and Moral Order,* 12.

as Tertullian, due to the close relation of these doctrines to one's doctrine of God, Christ, and the resurrection. The contemporary church must learn from its ancient heritage and, as a "bearer of glad tidings" in its own conversations of orthodoxy and heresy, declare the goodness of the God-given body in light of the "gnostic" anthropology of the transgender movement.

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The Tree of Life in the Book of Proverbs

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Abstract: This study seeks to discern what connection—if any—there might be between the use of "tree of life" (עֵץ חַיִּים) in the books of Proverbs and Genesis 1–3. It attempts, first, to understand how Solomon's worldview has been shaped by the Torah and the Davidic Covenant. Next, it considers all four occurrences of "tree of life" in Proverbs (3:18; 11:30; 13:12; 15:4) within their respective literary and structural contexts. Ultimately, it concludes that Solomon has employed "tree of life" to teach his son—the future Davidic king—the proper pathway towards re-entering the Edenic experience of covenant life with Yahweh.

In the Hebrew Bible, the expression "tree of life" (עֵץ חַיִּים) occurs only seven times and only in two different Old Testament books—Genesis (2:9; 3:22, 24) and Proverbs (3:18; 11:30; 13:12; 15:4). This phenomenon raises a question: Might there be a connection between עֵץ חַיִּים in the garden of Eden and עֵץ חַיִּים in the book of Proverbs? And if so, what precisely is the nature of that relationship? Within scholarship, many have denied such a relationship. Some argue that Proverbs' four-fold employment of "tree of life" functions merely as a figure of speech painting a picture of the blessed life enjoyed by all who would heed these passages.[1] Others maintain, on the basis of similarities shared between Proverbs and various ancient Near Eastern wisdom texts, that Proverbs' usage of "tree of life" derives from an ancient Egyptian or Mesopotamian background, rather than from Genesis.[2]

I contend, however, that עֵץ חַיִּים is more than simply a stock metaphor employed for the purpose of portraying the good life through arboreal imagery. Furthermore, I would also maintain that Proverbs' utilization of this expression draws influence, not primarily—if at all—from other ancient Near

[1] See, for instance, William McKane, *Proverbs: A New Approach*, OTL (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1970), 296; Roland E. Murphy, *Proverbs*, WBC 22 (Nashville: Nelson, 1998), 22; Michael V. Fox, *Proverbs 1–9: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB 18a (New York: Doubleday, 2000), 159.

[2] For a survey of sources discussing "tree of life" in the ancient Near East, see Victor Avigdor Hurowitz, "Paradise Regained: Proverbs 3:13–20 Reconsidered," in *Sefer Moshe: The Moshe Weinfeld Jubilee Volume: Studies in the Bible, Ancient Near East, Qumran, and Post-Biblical Judaism*, ed. Moshe Weinfeld, Chaim Cohen, Avi Hurvitz, and Shalom Paul (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2004), 50 n. 2. For an overview of tree imagery in ancient Egypt, Mesopotamia, and Syria-Palestine, see William R. Osborne, *Trees and Kings: A Comparative Analysis of Tree Imagery in Israel's Prophetic Tradition and the Ancient Near East*, BBRSup 18 (University Park: Pennsylvania State University, 2017), 31–87.

Eastern texts and beliefs, but instead from Solomon's[3] own familiarity with the Hebrew Scriptures.[4] Consequently, I argue that the four instances of "tree of life" in Proverbs take their cue from the opening chapters of Genesis, with Solomon intentionally appropriating this phrase as a metaphorical allusion to teach his son that the way the Davidic king enjoys Edenic life in Yahweh's covenant presence is by walking in wisdom.

I make this argument in two steps. First, I consider how Solomon, Israel's king, was heavily influenced by the writings of the Torah, as well as by the Davidic Covenant—both factors that dramatically shaped his worldview. My goal is to demonstrate how natural it would have been for Solomon to draw upon this scriptural-covenantal framework, along with its various themes, images, and expressions—such as מִיְחַ יְעֵ—when addressing his son in proverbial discourse. Second, I examine all four occurrences of "tree of life" in Proverbs within their proper literary and structural contexts, establishing Proverbs 3:18's usage of מִיְחַ יְעֵ as the foundation upon which the other three passages build and expand. Altogether, Proverbs' four instances of "tree of life" are intended to transport the imagination of Solomon's original audience back to the garden in Genesis and help weave together a comprehensive portrait of how the Davidic king might be able to re-enter the Adamic experience of covenant life with Yahweh.

1. Understanding and Embracing Solomon's Worldview

How one makes sense of the four recurrences of מִיְחַ יְעֵ in Proverbs depends upon the framework with which one approaches this book. Across the landscape of Proverbs scholarship, most have categorized this corpus as Wisdom Literature.[5] However, in his work, *An Obituary for "Wisdom Literature"*, Will Kynes convincingly unmasks this genre label as a nineteenth-century construct, weighed down by post-Enlightenment presuppositions, and imposed onto the biblical text.[6] Particularly significant is Kynes's trenchant observation that when we approach a text according to this framework, we tend to highlight

[3] All four occurrences of עֵץ חַיִּים in Proverbs are found in sections authored by Solomon. Proverbs 3:18 occurs in the first Solomonic collection (1:1–9:18), which is introduced in 1:1 as "The proverbs of Solomon the son of David, king of Israel." Similarly, Proverbs 11:30, 13:12, and 15:4 all occur in the second Solomonic collection (10:1–22:16), which is likewise introduced in 10:1 by the phrase, "The proverbs of Solomon." For a discussion of Solomonic authorship in Proverbs, see Bruce K. Waltke, *The Book of Proverbs Chapters 1–15*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 31–36; Andrew E. Steinmann, *Proverbs*, Concordia Commentary (St. Louis: Concordia, 2009), 1–4, 16–19.

[4] On this point, I agree with Katherine J. Dell, *The Book of Proverbs in Social and Theological Context* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 14: "In my view, not enough attention has been given to hints within Proverbs itself of wider contextual links. This has been done in reference to the ancient Near East, but perhaps to the neglect of looking at certain integrating connections with other Old Testament texts and contexts." Likewise, James M. Hamilton Jr., *God's Glory in Salvation through Judgment: A Biblical Theology* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 290 n. 46, argues, "It seems to me that the dichotomizing tendency of critical scholarship works like a reverse magnetic force, preventing these kinds of [inner-biblical] connections, while the broader context of ancient Near Eastern parallels can easily distract interpreters from the nearer context of the Old Testament canon."

[5] For general discussions of the Wisdom Literature genre, see Waltke, *Proverbs 1–15*, 50–55; Fox, *Proverbs 1–9*, 17–27; Duane A. Garrett, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs*, NAC 14 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1993), 21–28.

[6] Will Kynes, *An Obituary for "Wisdom Literature": The Birth, Death, and Intertextual Reintegration of a Biblical Corpus* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019). Kynes argues that Wisdom Literature is "an unwieldy scholarly category developed in mid-nineteenth-century Germany to meet the ideological demands of that time and place" (p. 2). Elsewhere, he writes: "The diverse contents of the Wisdom corpus have consistently given attempts

its distinctiveness as Wisdom Literature to such an extent that we sever it from the rest of the biblical canon, resulting in an isolated reading or "canonical separation."[7] Consequently, the book of Proverbs is often "singled out from the canon as uniquely concerned with reason or philosophy and participating in 'a different world of thought,'" in contrast to the rest of the Old Testament.[8]

It appears, therefore, that we need to adopt a different approach when it comes to reading Proverbs—not one that takes its cue from a modern, man-made construct influenced by the cultural setting in which it developed, but rather one that follows the worldview according to which Solomon himself seemed to operate. In other words, I believe the best way to account for Proverbs' usage of עֵץ חַיִּים is by "understanding and embracing the interpretive perspective of the biblical authors."[9]

The opening verse of Proverbs furnishes us with a helpful starting point for accomplishing this task. Proverbs 1:1 introduces Solomon as the principal author of this corpus,[10] drawing attention to two crucial aspects regarding his identity: Solomon was (1) the son of David, and (2) the king of Israel. While it may be easy to overlook this as nothing more than a formality, could Proverbs 1:1 possess greater significance than it has often been credited with? Perhaps Solomon's royal heritage as David's descendant and successor to the throne should guide the way one reads the book of Proverbs? And if so, how might his identity as both Israel's king *and* David's son have informed his own interpretive perspective and worldview?

1.1. The King of Israel and the Law of Yahweh

Before the Israelites ever entered the Promised Land or were appointed a human king to rule over them, Yahweh had already provided his people with instructions in Deuteronomy 17:14–20 regarding the subject of kingship in the land. Jamie Grant parses out this passage into four thematic units: (1) the king must be chosen by Yahweh (v. 15); (2) the king must be a Hebrew (vv. 15, 20); (3) the king's royal power and authority must be limited (vv. 16–17); and (4) the Torah must be a central part of the king's daily life (vv. 18–19).[11] Key to our discussion is the fourth component, which stipulates that Israel's king

to define its distinctive features a certain instability, characterized by vague, abstract, and potentially all-encompassing definitions" (p. 42).

[7] Kynes, *Obituary for "Wisdom Literature"*, 157–59, 188–90, 220. See the similar discussions in Dell, *Proverbs in Social and Theological Context*, 1–17, 126–30; Richard P. Belcher Jr., *Finding Favour in the Sight of God: A Theology of Wisdom Literature*, NSBT 46 (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2018), 1–10.

[8] Kynes, *Obituary for "Wisdom Literature"*, 220. For an example of this type of "canonical separation," see Michael V. Fox, *Proverbs 10–31: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB 18B (New York: Doubleday, 2009), 946. Fox argues for "the autonomy of wisdom," claiming "wisdom offers itself as a complete and self-contained moral system" and that "Proverbs shows no interest in Yahweh's revealed Torah."

[9] James M. Hamilton Jr., *Typology—Understanding the Bible's Promise-Shaped Patterns: How Old Testament Expectations Are Fulfilled in Christ* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2022), 27. Elsewhere, Hamilton defines "interpretive perspective" as "the framework of assumptions and presuppositions, associations and identifications, truths and symbols that are taken for granted as an author or speaker describes the world and the events that take place in it." James M. Hamilton Jr., *What is Biblical Theology? A Guide to the Bible's Story, Symbolism, and Patterns* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014), 15.

[10] Waltke, *Proverbs 1–15*, 36–37, posits, "An anonymous final editor appended Collections V–VII [Prov 25:1–31:31] to Solomon's Collections I–IV [Prov 1:1–24:34]. Judging by biblical analogues, he allowed the original heading attributing the work to Solomon (1:1) to stand as the title of his final composition because Solomon is the principal author of the sayings (chs. 1–29) and the most distinguished author of his anthology."

[11] Jamie A. Grant, *The King as Exemplar: The Function of Deuteronomy's Kingship Law in the Shaping of the Book of Psalms*, SBLAB 17 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2004), 193. For an exegetical treatment of these

must copy down the entire Torah, keep it with him at all times, and carefully immerse himself in its instruction through reading and recitation.[12] Hence, these verses paint "an image of an individual whose whole world-and-life view is thoroughly shaped by and grounded in the teaching of Yahweh…. It is a powerful image of one who is committed to do more than learn from his 'assigned text'—he seeks to shape and form his whole life and outlook based around that text."[13]

It seems, therefore, logical to infer that Solomon, seeking to be a faithful king of Israel, would have taken the instructions of Deuteronomy 17:14–20 to heart and devoted himself to the daily copying, keeping, and reciting of the Torah. And it likely follows that this Torah—replete with all of its remarkable narratives, significant events, recurring themes, notable patterns, rich imagery, urgent warnings, and beautiful promises—would have functioned as Solomon's primary source of worldview formation, shaping his moral imagination and coloring his poetic sensibilities. Consequently, assuming all of these things to be the case, it would be plausible to conclude that when Solomon delivered his proverbs under the Spirit's inspiration, he did so by drawing from the deep spiritual well, bored through countless hours of immersion in the Torah.[14]

1.2. The Son of David and the Davidic Covenant

Not only does Proverbs 1:1 introduce Solomon as the king of Israel, it also highlights him as the son of David. Solomon's Davidic lineage carries significant implications because it suggests that, in addition to being steeped in the Torah's teachings, Solomon would have also been cognizant of the covenant Yahweh had made with his father in 2 Samuel 7.[15] Here Yahweh promises to make David "a lasting

verses, see Daniel I. Block, "The Burden of Leadership: The Mosaic Paradigm of Kingship (Deut. 17:14–20)," *BSac* 162.3 (2005): 259–78.

[12] Jeffrey H. Tigay, *Deuteronomy* דברים*: The Traditional Hebrew Text with the New JPS Translation Commentary*, JPSTC (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1996), 169, comments, "Since reading in ancient times was normally done audibly (the Hebrew term for read, *kara'* [קרא], literally means 'call out'), reading included reciting." Thus, whereas Deuteronomy 17:18 emphasizes the visual and tactile aspects of handwriting a copy of the Torah, 17:19 appears to emphasize the verbal and auditory aspects of reading and reciting it aloud.

[13] Grant, *King as Exemplar*, 207. Similarly, Christopher B. Ansberry, *Be Wise, My Son, and Make My Heart Glad: An Exploration of the Courtly Nature of the Book of Proverbs*, BZAW 422 (New York: De Gruyter, 2010), 188, remarks, "Though the ideals of health, security, proficient rule, prosperity, and justice may be inherent in this paradigmatic model of righteous governance, Deuteronomy's principal concern is the inculcation of the torah (Deut 17:18–20), that is, the cultivation and embodiment of the community's covenantal values in its ruler."

[14] This is not to deny the role that Solomon's wisdom played in his proverbial compositions. First Kings 4:29–34 draws explicit attention to the unparalleled nature of his wisdom and connects it to the thousands of proverbs he spoke. Nevertheless, when we consider the life of Solomon within the context of 1 Kings 1–11, we observe that the wisdom God had blessed Solomon with always went together with Solomon's own devotion to the Torah. For instance, in 1 Kings 3:6–14, when God affirms Solomon's prayer for wisdom, he gives this condition: "If you walk in my ways, keeping my statutes and commandments, as your father David walked, then I will prolong your days" (v. 14). Indeed, the very foundation undergirding Solomon's wisdom was his commitment to knowing, trusting, and following the teachings of the Torah, such that when his faithfulness to the Torah waned, so too did his ability to discern and rule wisely (e.g., see 1 Kgs 11:1–13). Hence, Solomon's wisdom in the Proverbs ultimately stems from and reflects his Torah-shaped worldview. As Thomas R. Schreiner, *The King in His Beauty: A Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013), 284, writes, "Wisdom is not a secular enterprise; rather, it is irrevocably tied to devotion to Yahweh and to the commands revealed in the Torah."

[15] Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant: A Biblical-Theological Understanding of the Covenants*, 2nd ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018), 447, points out that "while 2 Samuel 7 does not specifically call the arrangement a covenant, the term *bĕrît* is in fact used in 2 Samuel 23:5; Psalms 89:3, 28, 34, 39; 132:11;

dynasty, kingdom, and throne" (vv. 11b–13, 16) centered on a father-son relationship shared between Yahweh and a future king from David's line of descent (vv. 14–15).[16] This Davidic Covenant would go on to have a noticeable influence, not only upon future writings and prophecies such as Psalm 89 or Isaiah 55,[17] but also upon the future trajectory of the lives of David's offspring—including Solomon.

Indeed, we find ample evidence indicating that Solomon was both well-aware of and devoted to the Davidic Covenant. In 1 Kings 2:1–4, as David nears the end of his life and Solomon is poised to take the throne, David gives a charge to his successor, exhorting Solomon to keep the Torah, "so that Yahweh may carry out his promise which he spoke concerning me, saying, 'If your sons are careful of their way, to walk before Me in truth with all their heart and with all their soul, you shall not lack a man on the throne of Israel'" (v. 4).[18] In this verse, David refers to Yahweh's covenant promise from 2 Samuel 7, paraphrasing its content.[19] By so doing, he has effectively grounded his charge to Solomon in verses 2–3 with an unmistakable allusion back to the Davidic Covenant in verse 4.[20]

Moreover, just a few chapters later in 1 Kings 8, Solomon himself recalls the Davidic Covenant during both an address he gives to the people of Israel (vv. 12–21), as well as a prayer of dedication he offers up to Yahweh (vv. 22–53; especially vv. 22–26). In fact, throughout verses 12–26, Solomon refers three times to Yahweh's covenant promise to David (vv. 20, 24, 25). The resemblance is difficult to miss, particularly between Solomon's quoted paraphrase in 1 Kings 8:25 and David's earlier words from 2:4. The lexical similarities are highlighted in bold in Table 1.

and 2 Chronicles 13:5. Moreover, *hesed*, the term used of the Davidic covenant in Isaiah 55:3, *is used* in 2 Samuel 7:15" (emphasis original).

[16] Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 449.

[17] See Gentry's thorough treatment of these two passages in Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 459–79.

[18] Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations are taken from the New American Standard Bible 1995 translation.

[19] The actual promise cited in 1 Kings 2:4 is not a direct quotation from any portion of 2 Samuel 7, so it is best to regard it as a general paraphrase of the Davidic Covenant. Interestingly, the verse that appears to be most akin to 1 Kings 2:4 is Psalm 132:12 ("If your sons will keep my covenant and my testimony which I will teach them, their sons also shall sit upon your throne forever"), which, within the broader context of this psalm, functions as a commentary on the Davidic Covenant by rehearsing the covenant oaths sworn by David and Yahweh. Adam D. Hensley, *Covenant Relationships and the Editing of the Hebrew Psalter*, LHBOTS 666 (London: T&T Clark, 2018), 108–10, argues that Psalm 132:12 functions as a positive way of expressing 2 Samuel 7:14 (and Ps 89:31–33).

[20] Note also the considerable degree of lexical overlap shared between 1 Kings 2:3–4 and Deuteronomy 17:18–20: לִשְׁמֹר (Deut 17:19; 1 Kgs 2:3); חֻקֹּתָיו/הַחֻקִּים (Deut 17:19; 1 Kgs 2:3); מִצְוֹתָיו/הַמִּצְוָה (Deut 17:20; 1 Kgs 2:3); בְּתוֹרַת/הַתּוֹרָה (Deut 17:20; 1 Kgs 2:3); תַּעֲשֶׂה/לַעֲשׂוֹתָם (Deut 17:19; 1 Kgs 2:3); בָּנָיִךְ/וּבָנָיו (Deut 17:20; 1 Kgs 2:4); עַל כִּסֵּא (Deut 17:18; 1 Kgs 2:4). David has, as it were, brought together the Kingship Law of Deuteronomy 17:14–20 and the Davidic Covenant of 2 Samuel 7, such that "here we have, side-by-side, the promise to David and the law of Moses." Dale Ralph Davis, *1 Kings: The Wisdom and the Folly*, Focus on the Bible (Fearn, Ross-shire: Christian Focus, 2002), 27.

Table 1. Lexical Similarities between 1 Kings 2:4 and 8:25[21]

1 Kings 2:4b (my translation)	1 Kings 8:25b (my translation)
"**If your sons guard their way, by walking before Me** in truth, with all their heart and with all their soul," saying, "**a man shall not be cut off for you** from **upon the throne of Israel**." אִם־יִשְׁמְרוּ בָנֶיךָ אֶת־דַּרְכָּם לָלֶכֶת לְפָנַי בֶּאֱמֶת בְּכָל־לְבָבָם וּבְכָל־נַפְשָׁם לֵאמֹר לֹא־יִכָּרֵת לְךָ אִישׁ מֵעַל כִּסֵּא יִשְׂרָאֵל	"**A man shall not be cut off for you** from before Me, to sit **upon the throne of Israel**, only **if your sons guard their way, by walking before Me** as you have walked before Me." לֹא־יִכָּרֵת לְךָ אִישׁ מִלְּפָנַי יֹשֵׁב עַל־כִּסֵּא יִשְׂרָאֵל רַק תָּכְלַהָ רשֶׁאֲכַּ יֹנָפְל תכֶלֶל םכָּרְדַּ־תאֶ ךָינֶבָ וּרְמְשְׁיִ־םאִ יָנָפְלְ

Lastly, perhaps the most tell-tale sign that Solomon both knew about and was committed to the Davidic Covenant was his decision to build a temple for Yahweh. In 2 Samuel 7:12–13, Yahweh's covenant with David had included a promise that, after David's death, one of his descendants would arise and build a house for Yahweh's name. This is precisely what Solomon—David's descendant—does in 1 Kings 5–8.[22] Solomon's oversight of the building of a temple for Yahweh's name would become his defining accomplishment as Israel's king—an accomplishment stemming from his keen awareness of and regard for the Davidic Covenant. He himself makes this explicit in 1 Kings 5:5: "Behold, I intend to build a house for the name of Yahweh my God, as Yahweh spoke to David my father, saying, 'Your son, whom I will set on your throne in your place, he will build the house for my name.'" Thus, Solomon's worldview was not only shaped by the Torah of Yahweh, which he spent his days as Israel's king imbibing, but also by the promises of the Davidic Covenant, to which he was staunchly committed. As we have just seen, both his massive temple-building project in 1 Kings 5–8, as well as the multiple references he makes throughout these chapters to Yahweh's covenant with David, clearly attest to this reality.[23]

1.3. Synthesis

Given these considerations, it appears that in the book of Proverbs, we find Solomon, a Davidic king, who, having deeply immersed himself in the Torah and taken to heart Yahweh's promises in the Davidic Covenant—eternal dominion and dynasty,[24] provided an obedient son sits upon the throne—

[21] Hamilton, *Typology*, 84, briefly identifies three of the lexical links shared between these two verses: "the negative particle לֹא ('not'), the verb for 'cut off' (כָּרַת), and the term 'man' (אִישׁ)." In this table, however, I have highlighted several additional connections.

[22] Strikingly, when following the order of the MT from Genesis through Kings, the three lexemes בָּנָה ("build"), בַּיִת ("house"), and שֵׁם ("name")—with שֵׁם referring specifically to Yahweh's name—only occur together in the following passages: 2 Samuel 7:13; 1 Kings 3:2; 5:3, 5; 8:16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 43, 44, 48; 9:3; 2 Kings 21:4. Ten of these fourteen occurrences are found in 1 Kings 5–8, and the two before them (2 Sam 7:13 and 1 Kgs 3:2) each anticipate, in some manner, Solomon's temple-building project.

[23] Psalm 127 also corroborates the notion that Solomon's interpretive perspective was influenced by the promises of the Davidic Covenant. This Solomonic psalm addresses the dual themes of house-building (vv. 1–2) and offspring (vv. 3–5). Both themes feature prominently in the Davidic Covenant, as Yahweh promises to build a house for David and make him a great name by raising up one of his future offspring and establishing his kingdom permanently. This offspring will build a house for Yahweh's name, and Yahweh will establish his throne forever.

[24] Here I draw from the title of Stephen G. Dempster's work, *Dominion and Dynasty: A Theology of the Hebrew Bible*, NSBT 15 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003).

now extols the covenantal values of this same Torah to his son and future successor through proverbial address.[25] Here, I would draw three working conclusions that will prove relevant as we turn next to examine Solomon's use of עֵץ חַיִּים in Proverbs. (1) Solomon's Torah-shaped worldview likely would have included his concept of "life" (חַיִּים), a concept which, in the Torah, entails much more than merely the presence of a physical heartbeat, or even earthly, temporal prosperity. If this is the case, then for Solomon true life was defined in relation to the experience of Yahweh's covenant presence.[26] (2) Because Solomon's poetic imagination and artistic sensibilities had been formed by the world of the Torah, his aim in the Proverbs is not simply to communicate the *principles* of the Torah, but to present these principles by creatively utilizing the *language* of the Torah.[27] For this reason, his employment of "tree of life" is not just a common metaphor; it is a vehicle intended to transport readers back to Eden and the world of Genesis 1–3. (3) Solomon's familiarity with the Torah suggests that he understood the Davidic Covenant not in a vacuum, but instead, against the backdrop of and in continuity with the various covenants Yahweh had previously made throughout Israel's history.[28] In other words, there may have been a covenantal dimension behind Solomon's usage of עֵץ חַיִּים, such that he has cast the Davidic king in an Adamic light.[29]

2. Examining the Four Occurrences of "Tree of Life" in Proverbs Within Their Literary and Structural Context

The three working conclusions discussed above position us now to turn our attention to Proverbs and its four-fold usage of the expression עֵץ חַיִּים. As previously noted, עֵץ חַיִּים appears in the following verses: Proverbs 3:18, 11:30, 13:12, and 15:4. Before examining these texts, however, we must first consider their respective placement within the broader literary structure of the book. Most scholars

[25] Patrick Schreiner, *The Kingdom of God and the Glory of the Cross*, SSBT (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018), 70, writes, "Solomon casts his proverbs as instructions from a father to a son, training him to be the ideal king who establishes David's forever dynasty." Similarly, Hamilton, *Typology*, 158, explains, "The book of Proverbs presents the son of David, whom God said would be a son to him, teaching the wisdom of Torah to his son." While not discussed here, it is also important to note the influence that Deuteronomy 6's instruction to parents has on the book of Proverbs. On this point, see Ansberry, *Be Wise, My Son*, 187–89; Belcher, *Finding Favour*, 45–46.

[26] See L. Michael Morales, *Who Shall Ascend the Mountain of the Lord?: A Biblical Theology of the Book of Leviticus*, NSBT 37 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2015), 23. Morales's thesis is that "the primary theme and theology of Leviticus (and of the Pentateuch as a whole) is *YHWH's opening a way for humanity to dwell in the divine Presence*" (emphasis original). Consequently, he maintains that the Pentateuch presents fullness of life in parallel with nearness to Yahweh's presence and, conversely, death in parallel with exile from Yahweh's presence.

[27] See Richard L. Schultz, "Unity or Diversity in Wisdom Theology? A Canonical and Covenantal Perspective," *TynBul* 48 (1997): 295–99; Dell, *Proverbs in Social and Theological Context*, 167–78.

[28] I have in mind here the Adamic, Noahic, Abrahamic, and Mosaic Covenants. One text suggesting that Solomon understood the Davidic Covenant to be in continuity with these previous covenants is Psalm 72. This Solomonic psalm connects the Davidic Covenant back to the Abrahamic Covenant (so, Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 482–85) and to the Adamic Covenant (so, Hamilton, *Typology*, 153–54). Thus, Christopher A. Beetham, "From Creation to New Creation: The Biblical Epic of King, Human Vicegerency, and Kingdom," in *From Creation to New Creation: Biblical Theology and Exegesis*, ed. Benjamin L. Gladd and Daniel M. Gurtner (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2013), 249, notes, "Ps 72 begins to read like an entreaty for an Edenic kingdom, secured by Davidic vicegerency, in fulfillment of God's original intentions for creation."

[29] For a discussion of Solomon as an Adamic figure, see John A. Davies, "'Discerning Between Good and Evil': Solomon as a New Adam in 1 Kings," *WTJ* 73 (2011): 39–57; Hamilton, *Typology*, 154–65.

agree that the general structure of Proverbs may be divided into several collections based on numerous introductory headings found throughout the book, as displayed in Table 2.

Table 2. The Structure of the Book of Proverbs[30]

Text	Heading
Proverbs 1:1–9:18 Solomonic Proverbs I	"The proverbs of Solomon the son of David, king of Israel" (Prov 1:1)
Proverbs 10:1–22:16 Solomonic Proverbs II	"The proverbs of Solomon" (Prov 10:1a)
Proverbs 22:17–24:22 Words of the Wise I	"Incline your ear and hear the words of the wise" (Prov 22:17a)
Proverbs 24:23–34 Words of the Wise II	"These also are sayings of the wise" (Prov 24:23a)
Proverbs 25:1–29:27 Solomonic Proverbs III, transcribed by King Hezekiah	"These also are proverbs of Solomon which the men of Hezekiah, king of Judah, transcribed" (Prov 25:1)
Proverbs 30:1–33 Words of Agur	"The words of Agur the son of Jakeh, the oracle" (Prov 30:1a)
Proverbs 31:1–31 Words of Lemuel	"The words of King Lemuel, the oracle which his mother taught him" (Prov 31:1)

According to this seven-part layout, the first iteration of עֵץ חַיִּים in Proverbs 3:18 occurs during Solomonic Proverbs I (1:1–9:18), whereas the remaining three instances—11:30; 13:12; and 15:4—are all found across Solomonic Proverbs II (10:1–22:16). This structural observation is significant because these two collections differ vastly from one another. The former features a series of lengthy lectures, whereas the second consists of a multitude of abbreviated, individual statements.[31] This perceptible difference in form highlights a difference in function as well. As Christopher Ansberry explains, "Chapters 1–9 serve as the introduction to the work, providing a hermeneutical framework within which to read the document. This framework delineates the discourse setting in which the teaching is delivered and provides a lens through which to read and assess the litany of sayings in the sentence literature [Prov 10:1–22:17]."[32]

[30] My structure largely adopts the demarcations identified by Waltke, *Proverbs 1–15*, 9–28; Garrett, *Proverbs*, 39, 43–46; Steinmann, *Proverbs*, 42–44; Fox, *Proverbs 1–9*, 5; Schreiner, *King in His Beauty*, 280; Hamilton, *God's Glory in Salvation through Judgment*, 290–91; Derek Kidner, *Proverbs*, TOTC 17 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1964), 22; Paul R. House, *Old Testament Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1998), 441–42. Note, however, the following distinctions: Waltke subdivides Proverbs 1:1–9:18 into 1:1–7, 1:8–8:36, and 9:1–18; Garrett, Steinmann, and Kidner each split Proverbs 31 into 31:1–9 and 31:10–31; Fox takes Proverbs 30–31 as a series of four appendices (30:1–14, 15–33; 31:1–9, and 10–31).

[31] Waltke, *Proverbs 1–15*, 14, comments, "The prologue's [Prov 1:1–9:18] extended poems now give way to the short, pithy, one-verse aphorisms composed almost exclusively of bicola (the two verset halves of a verse)."

[32] Ansberry, *Be Wise, My Son*, 74. Similarly, Steinmann, *Proverbs*, 43, writes, "Proverbs 1–9 is the introduction to his work and is intended to set forth his wisdom in a more systematic way than could be accomplished in collections of shorter sayings. Therefore, one needs to understand well the wisdom of this introductory section

Given the unique relationship shared between these two sections, it seems best to allow the initial appearance of עֵץ חַיִּים in Solomonic Proverbs I to inform its three-fold recurrence throughout Solomonic Proverbs II.[33] Therefore, as I begin working systematically through all four instances of עֵץ חַיִּים in the book of Proverbs, I will first examine the phrase's foundational usage in 3:18 and then consider how its next three iterations in 11:30, 13:12, and 15:4 build upon the "hermeneutical framework" mentioned by Ansberry.

2.1. Tree of Life in Proverbs 3:18

> A tree of life is she to those who take hold of her,
> and those who grasp her are blessed. (Prov 3:18, my translation)

עֵץ־חַיִּים הִיא לַמַּחֲזִיקִים בָּהּ וְתֹמְכֶיהָ מְאֻשָּׁר׃

Proverbs 3:18 stands at the end of a literary subunit consisting of verses 13–18. The root אשׁר forms an *inclusio* around these verses, doubling as both the first word of verse 13 (אַשְׁרֵי, "blessed"), as well as the last word of verse 18 (מְאֻשָּׁר, "are blessed"). Strikingly, this same root occurs nowhere else in Proverbs 3. Within this אשׁר-*inclusio* of verses 13 and 18 we find further indicators of a unified subunit, as verses 14–17 further divide into two pairs that structurally parallel one another (vv. 14–15 and 16–17). In each pairing, the first three lines build up to a climactic fourth line, which opens with the only two instances of the phrase וְכָל in all of Proverbs 3 (וְכָל־חֲפָצֶיךָ, v. 15; וְכָל־נְתִיבוֹתֶיהָ, v. 17).[34] Additionally, after verse 13 explicitly introduces "wisdom" (חָכְמָה) and "understanding" (תְּבוּנָה) to the reader, the rest of the unit proceeds to detail an extended personification of this sapiential duo through repeated employment of the third-person feminine singular suffix and pronoun, neither of which is found anywhere else in this chapter.[35]

Moreover, Proverbs 3:13–18 is situated within a larger section extending from verses 13–20. Verse 19 again makes direct mention to "wisdom" (חָכְמָה) and "understanding" (תְּבוּנָה), just as verse 13 had, establishing a continuity that stitches verses 13–18 and 19–20 together as one thematically unified segment.[36] Also, within the broader structure of Proverbs 3, the three-fold occurrence of the word "son" (בֵּן) in verses 1, 11, and 12, appears to mark off verses 1–12 as a unit distinct from verses 13–20. Strikingly, we find yet another reference to בֵּן in verse 21, which suggests that Solomon is now resuming his previous

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and then *read the shorter sayings that follow in light of this introduction*" (emphasis mine). Kidner, *Proverbs*, 23, argues that "each cool, objective aphorism" in Proverbs 10:1–22:16 is "a miniature and particular outworking of the wisdom and folly whose whole course [the reader] has seen spread out before him in Section I [Prov 1:1–9:18]."

[33] Contra Hurowitz, "Paradise Regained," 50. Curiously, despite arguing that Prov 3:18's usage of עֵץ חַיִּים "is to be associated … specifically with the famous, legendary 'Tree of Life' that stood at the center of the Garden of Eden," Hurowitz nevertheless dismisses any Edenic significance behind the other three occurrences of עֵץ חַיִּים in Proverbs 11:30, 13:12, and 15:4: "In the last three of these cases, the 'tree of life' is clearly a metaphor, appearing in individual, one-line adages, and lacking any wider literary context." See also Christine Roy Yoder, "Wisdom is the Tree of Life: A Study of Proverbs 3:13–20 and Genesis 2–3," in *Reading Proverbs Intertextually*, ed. Katherine J. Dell and Will Kynes, LHBOTS 629 (New York: T&T Clark, 2019), 11–12. Yoder wrongly concurs with Hurowitz.

[34] See Paul B. Overland, "Literary Structure in Proverbs 1–9" (PhD dissertation, Brandeis University, 1988), 310.

[35] The third-person feminine singular pronoun הִיא occurs in vv. 15 and 18, while words containing a third-person feminine singular suffix include: סַחְרָהּ (v. 14), תְּבוּאָתָהּ (v. 14), בָּהּ (vv. 15, 18), בִּימִינָהּ (v. 16), בִּשְׂמֹאולָהּ (v. 16), דְּרָכֶיהָ (v. 17), נְתִיבוֹתֶיהָ (v. 17), וְתֹמְכֶיהָ (v. 18).

[36] Only in Proverbs 3:13 and 19 does either חָכְמָה or תְּבוּנָה appear; and in both instances, they occur together.

discussion from verses 1–12.[37] Hence, Proverbs 3:13–20 forms a cohesive section centered on the personified subjects of חָכְמָה and תְּבוּנָה. At the same time, however, this section splits into two subunits, each of which addresses this חָכְמָה/תְּבוּנָה theme from differing perspectives: verses 13–18 highlight the "blessings" (אַשְׁרֵי, v. 13; מְאֻשָּׁר, v. 18) she offers to mankind, whereas verses 19–20 portray Yahweh's utilization of her at creation.[38]

Our discussion of the literary and structural unity of Proverbs 3:13–20 primes us for a closer examination of this passage's textual details, which are punctuated by a plethora of links to the opening chapters of Genesis. Verses 19–20 unmistakably refer to God's act of creation in Genesis. The words "earth" (אָרֶץ) and "heavens" (שָׁמַיִם) in Proverbs 3:19 recall Genesis 1:1: "In the beginning God created the heavens [הַשָּׁמַיִם] and the earth [הָאָרֶץ]."[39] Likewise, Proverbs 3:20's use of "the deeps" (תְּהוֹמוֹת) harkens back to this same term's original appearance in Genesis 1:2: "the earth was formless and empty, and darkness was over the surface of the deep [תְּהוֹם]."[40]

On a subtler note, the two-fold repetition of "man" (אָדָם) in Proverbs 3:13 may allude to God's creation of אָדָם in Genesis 1–2,[41] while the terms "good" (טוֹב) and "days" (יָמִים) found respectively in Proverbs 3:14 and 16 could be evoking the many occurrences of these two words throughout Genesis 1–3.[42] Furthermore, the mention of valuable stones and jewels in Proverbs 3:14–15 may share a thematic association with Genesis 2:10–14's description of the regions surrounding the garden of Eden—specifically the land of Havilah "where there is gold … bdellium and the onyx stone" (vv. 11–12).[43]

All of these lexical and thematic points of contact shared by Proverbs 3:13–20 and the Genesis creation account establish textual warrant favoring a purposeful connection between the presence of עֵץ חַיִּים in Proverbs 3:18 and in Genesis 2–3. But what precisely is that connection? To be sure, it cannot stand as a mere metaphor snagged from its garden context, emptied of its Edenic significance, and

[37] Hurowitz, "Paradise Regained," 51, remarks: "Proverbs 3 is, on the whole, a collection of a dozen, mostly negative admonitions (the word לא 'don't' appears 14 times [3:1–2, 3–4, 5–6, 7–8, 11–12, 21–24, 25–26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31–32]), each one phrased in the 2d-person sing. and each with a motive. Verses 13–20 are exceptions to this." Indeed, the absence of any imperatival verbs in vv. 13–20 is difficult to overlook.

[38] See Steinmann, *Proverbs*, 117–18; Hurowitz, "Paradise Regained," 52; Yoder, "Wisdom is the Tree of Life," 13.

[39] See also Genesis 2:1, 4, where אָרֶץ and שָׁמַיִם occur together again.

[40] Yoder, "Wisdom is the Tree of Life," 14, elaborating on Proverbs 3:20, comments, "'The waters of the abyss burst forth' (v. 20a)—that is, the subterranean seas 'were split open' (נבקעו) so that they might surge and rise through channels to nourish the rivers and oceans (cf. Gen 7:11; Job 38:8–11; Isa 35:6–7). The heavens begin to 'drip dew' like rain (v. 20b). Water rushing from below and above recalls similar imagery and emphasis on water in Genesis 2: an initial lack of rain (v. 5), a mist or stream (אד) that rises from the earth to water the 'whole face of the ground' (v. 6), the river that flows out of Eden and splits into four branches to saturate the world (vv. 11–13)."

[41] Interestingly, the expression אַשְׁרֵי אָדָם, found in Proverbs 3:13, is later repeated in 8:34, where it occurs once more in close proximity to a discussion regarding Yahweh's employment of personified wisdom at creation (Prov 8:22–31), and is immediately followed in v. 35 by the promise of חַיִּים for whomever finds her. See also the discussion on אַשְׁרֵי אָדָם in Hurowitz, "Paradise Regained," 56–57.

[42] טוֹב occurs 15x in Genesis 1–3: 1:4, 9, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31; 2:9 [2x], 12, 17, 18; 3:5, 6, 22. Various forms of יוֹם occur 20x in Genesis 1–3: 1:5 [2x], 8, 13, 14 [2x], 16, 18, 19, 23, 31; 2:2 [2x], 3, 4, 17; 3:5, 8, 14, 17.

[43] See Yoder, "Wisdom is the Tree of Life," 14–15; Hurowitz, "Paradise Regained," 57–58. Both Yoder and Hurowitz cite Ezekiel 28:13, which refers explicitly to Eden and associates the garden with "every precious stone." Yoder relates this idea back to Proverbs 3:14's use of the term טוֹב: "Whereas Genesis declares that the land of Havilah's gold is good (טוב, Gen 2:12), Prov 3:14–15 asserts that the profits of wisdom are 'better than' (טוב מן) and more precious than any fine metal or gemstone."

utilized simply to convey a flourishing earthly life.[44] The clue is found both in Proverbs 3:18's close proximity to verse 17, where Woman Wisdom's "ways" (דְּרָכֶיהָ) and "paths" (נְתִיבוֹתֶיהָ) are commended, and in the juxtaposition between דְּרָכֶיהָ דַרְכֵי—the first two words in verse 17—and עֵץ חַיִּים—the first two words in verse 18. Hurowitz's analysis on this point is insightful:

> Verse 17 starts דרכיה דרכי 'Her ways are ways of', … while v. 18 begins with עץ חיים 'the Tree of Life'. Combining these words yields דרכיה דרכי עץ חיים 'Her ways are the ways of/toward the Tree of Life', echoing loudly דרך עץ החיים 'the way to the Tree of Life', which is the final locution, concluding the Garden of Eden story [Gen 3:24]. Only a reader so absent-minded that he would forget the content of one verse immediately upon reading the next would be deaf to the combination of words and obtuse to what they echo.[45]

If Hurowitz is correct, Proverbs 3:17–18 hints at the reversal of Genesis 3:24 and man's exile from the presence of Yahweh in the garden. Whereas in Genesis 3:24, Yahweh had driven Adam out of the garden and placed cherubim and a flaming sword to guard "the way to the tree of life" (אֶת־דֶּרֶךְ עֵץ הַחַיִּים), here in Proverbs 3:17–18, Solomon identifies wisdom as a "tree of life" (עֵץ חַיִּים) and endorses "her ways" (דְּרָכֶיהָ) to his son. In other words, through wisdom's paths, entrance into the garden—once barred—has now been reopened, so that the bliss of Eden may again be experienced. Covenant life in Yahweh's presence, which Adam had forfeited, can now be re-entered by the Davidic king who traverses the way of wisdom. As James Hamilton explains, "The way of wisdom is the way to enjoy God's presence, as if one walked with him in the cool of the day in the garden of Eden."[46]

Our treatment of Proverbs 3:18 now sets the stage for us to examine the three occurrences of עֵץ חַיִּים in Solomonic Proverbs II. As noted earlier, Solomonic Proverbs I provides readers with "an interpretative canon for understanding the individual sayings that begin in chapter 10…. [It is] a hermeneutical prism or guide through which to read the rest of the book."[47] Thus, the interpretive conclusions we have arrived at concerning Proverbs 3:18 function like a stepping stone as we consider how 11:30, 13:12, and 15:4 work together to paint a more fully-orbed, three-dimensional picture of what this garden-bound way of wisdom actually entails.[48]

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[44] Garrett, *Proverbs*, 82, posits, "With such an image not only as part of the biblical text but also as part of the common inheritance of ancient Near Eastern literature, it is unlikely that the highly literate court of Solomon would conceive of the tree of life merely as a metaphor of happiness. The words hold the promise of escape from the curse of death." He proceeds to elaborate in a footnote, "It is doubtful that such a primary symbol could be so drained of its original larger implications in the minds of the ancient readers" (82 n. 61). See also Belcher, *Finding Favour*, 70–73.

[45] Hurowitz, "Paradise Regained," 60.

[46] Hamilton, *God's Glory in Salvation through Judgment*, 295. Similarly, Yoder, "Wisdom is the Tree of Life," 18, states, "Prov 3:13–20 evokes Genesis 2–3 to commend wisdom as that which restores what was lost long ago, namely, a flourishing life in Eden—an existence of tranquillity, delight, abundance, beauty, and well-being."

[47] Belcher, *Finding Favour*, 45.

[48] My language of "fully-orbed" and "three-dimensional" is indebted to Peter Gentry's discussion of the recursive nature of Hebrew literature in *How to Read and Understand the Biblical Prophets* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017), 41–42. Gentry writes, "Normally a Hebrew writer would begin a discourse on a particular topic, develop it from a particular angle or perspective, and end by closing down that conversation. Then he would begin another conversation, taking up the *same topic again* from a different angle or point of view and considering it from a different perspective…. When two conversations or discourses on the same topic are heard or read in succession, they are meant to function like the left and right speakers of a stereo system…. In one sense the music from the left speaker is identical to that of the right, yet in another way it is slightly different so that when we hear the two

2.2. Tree of Life in Proverbs 11:30

> The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life,
> and he who takes souls is wise. (Prov 11:30, my translation)[49]

פְּרִי־צַדִּיק עֵץ חַיִּים וְלֹקֵחַ נְפָשׁוֹת חָכָם׃

Proverbs 11:30 is situated within the literary unit comprised of verses 28–31, stitched together by three instances of the word "righteous" (צַדִּיק, vv. 28, 30, 31) and two instances of the term "wise" (חָכָם, vv. 29, 30).[50] Furthermore, the use of nature and creation-related language throughout this passage ("leaf" [עָלֶה, v. 28], "wind" [רוּחַ, v. 29; translated "spirit" in Genesis 1:2], "fruit" [פְּרִי, v. 30], "tree of life" [עֵץ חַיִּים, v. 30], "earth" [אֶרֶץ, v. 31]) gives the entire section an internal thematic coherence, while also linking it back to Genesis 1–3 in a manner not unlike that observed earlier in Proverbs 3:13–20.[51] Relatedly, the terms לָקַח and נֶפֶשׁ in Proverbs 11:30 are both used on numerous occasions and in different ways throughout the creation account.[52] Lastly, whereas verses 28 and 31 both feature antithetical parallelism contrasting a positive line with a negative line, verses 29 and 30 are both synthetic—the former containing negative synthetic parallelism, and the latter, positive. Thus, the poetic contours of these four verses establish a chiastic structure:[53]

> A – v. 28: <u>He who trusts in his wealth will fall</u>,
> **but like a leaf, those who are righteous will flourish.**
>
> > B – v. 29: <u>He who troubles his own household will inherit the wind</u>,
> > <u>and a fool will be a servant to the wise of heart</u>.
> >
> > B' – v. 30: **The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life,**
> > **and he who takes souls is wise.**[54]

together, the effect is stereo instead of just one-dimensional or monaural. In Hebrew literature the ideas presented can be experienced in a similar manner" (emphasis original).

[49] Some interpret the second line of this verse (וְלֹקֵחַ נְפָשׁוֹת חָכָם) negatively to refer to one who kills or commits murder. Subsequently, in order to make logical sense of this rendering, they emend חָכָם ("wise") to חָמָס ("violent"). See, for instance, Garrett, *Proverbs*, 129; McKane, *Proverbs*, 432–33. I, however, do not hold to this alternative translation, along with its requisite emendation, for reasons which will become apparent during my analysis of this verse. For a discussion on this point, see Waltke, *Proverbs 1–15*, 510 n. 191.

[50] Verses 29 and 30 mark the only two occurrences of חָכָם in Proverbs 11.

[51] Osborne, *Trees and Kings*, 100.

[52] Various forms of לָקַח are used in Genesis 2:15, 21, 22, 23; 3:6, 19, 22, and 23; נֶפֶשׁ is employed to describe the living creatures in Genesis 1:20, 21, 24, 30; 2:7, and 19.

[53] In order to draw out the contrasts between the negative and positive lines of each verse, I have underlined the negative lines and bolded the positive lines. All of these verses are my own translation.

[54] The two words פְּרִי and לָקַח in Proverbs 11:30 are also found together in Genesis 3:6: "she took [וַתִּקַּח] from its fruit [מִפִּרְיוֹ] and ate." It seems a contrast is being drawn between the righteous and wise man in Proverbs 11:30 and the foolish and sinful woman in Genesis 3:6. Whereas the woman gave up her soul in order to take from the forbidden fruit, he who follows the way of wisdom and righteousness gives life-bringing fruit to others and takes—that is, saves—souls. On this point, see Steinmann, *Proverbs*, 290, 296.

A' – v. 31: **Behold, the righteous will be rewarded on the earth,**
how much more the wicked and the sinner?[55]

Significant for our purposes is the intimate association in Proverbs 11:30 between עֵץ חַיִּים and the fruit of a righteous man. As Osborne duly notes, "Righteousness produces the metaphorical arboreal transformation into a picture of fruitfulness and blessing."[56] The proverb appears to build upon Proverbs 3:18 by showing that only the one characterized by righteousness will be able to produce the sort of fruitful wisdom that leads back to the garden. This connection between wisdom and righteousness is reinforced by the synthetic parallelism of the verse, which places the righteous man in the first line side by side with the wise man in the second.[57] The wider literary and structural context of Proverbs 11:28–31 further establishes the wisdom-righteousness relationship, as evidenced by the various repetitions of "righteous" (צַדִּיק, vv. 28, 30, 31) and "wise" (חָכָם, vv. 29, 30) throughout these four verses, set in distinct contrast to references to "sin" (וְחוֹטֵא, v. 31), "wickedness" (רָשָׁע, v. 31), and "fool" (אֱוִיל, v. 29). Ultimately, the Davidic king who walks in wisdom doubles as a righteous ruler who faithfully models and leads his people into covenant life with Yahweh, unlike the fool of verse 29, who troubles his household.[58]

2.3. Tree of Life in Proverbs 13:12

A hope deferred makes sick the heart,
but a tree of life is a coming desire. (Prov 13:12, my translation)

תּוֹחֶלֶת מְמֻשָּׁכָה מַחֲלָה־לֵב וְעֵץ חַיִּים תַּאֲוָה בָּאָה׃

Proverbs 13:12 is also located within the context of a larger literary unit spanning verses 12–19. These verses are bracketed by an *inclusio* formed from the noun "desire" (תַּאֲוָה) immediately modified by a participle (תַּאֲוָה בָּאָה, v. 12; תַּאֲוָה נִהְיָה, v. 19).[59] The crux of this passage is verse 14, "the only proverb in this chapter that does not employ antithetical parallelism."[60] Furthermore, this is the only proverb in the unit that shares lexical links to *both* verses 12 and 19: "life" (חַיִּים) tethers verse 14 back to verse 12 (וְעֵץ חַיִּים, v. 12; מְקוֹר חַיִּים, v. 14), while the verb "turn" (סוּר) connects verse 14 forward to verse 19 (לָסוּר מִמֹּקְשֵׁי מָוֶת, v. 14; סוּר מֵרָע, v. 19). In this way, verse 14 stands as the central tent pole of the passage, tied down on both sides by the outer, *inclusio*-forming proverbs at each end of the unit. Its placement divides the text into two subunits consisting of verses 12–14 and 14–19.

[55] Although Proverbs 11:31 assumes the form of an *a fortiori* argument (see Waltke, *Proverbs 1–15*, 513–14), it still contains clear antithetical elements due to its mention of the "righteous" in the first line and "the wicked and the sinner" in the second. Note as well that while verse 28 begins with a negative line followed by a positive line, verse 31 reverses this order; it opens first with a positive line and then closes with a negative one.

[56] Osborne, *Trees and Kings*, 100.

[57] Note that verse 30 is the only proverb in this literary unit (and in the entire chapter) featuring both the words צַדִּיק and חָכָם.

[58] Schreiner, *Kingdom of God*, 70, writes, "Through the leadership of the king … the people are planted as oaks of righteousness in their land. The way to the land is by mimicking the good king in wisdom and meditating, obeying, and following the Torah." Elsewhere, he notes, "The ideal king was to lead the nation in a flourishing life full of wisdom, knowledge, and the fear of the Lord" (p. 66).

[59] Waltke, *Proverbs 1–15*, 562.

[60] Steinmann, *Proverbs*, 319.

In Proverbs 13:14–19, the terms "evil" (רָע, vv. 17, 19; see also רָשָׁע, v. 17) and "fool" (כְּסִיל, vv. 16, 19), each occur twice. These two words demonstrate that folly and evil are part and parcel with one another, strengthening the conclusions drawn from our discussion of Proverbs 11:30 regarding the moral dimension of wisdom. Conversely, Proverbs 13:12–14 highlights the Torah dimension of wisdom. Verse 14's opening phrase "the teaching of the wise" (תּוֹרַת חֲכָם) makes this plain by literally combining the Hebrew terms for "Torah" (תּוֹרָה) and "wise" (חָכָם) together.[61] Verse 13, the central verse of the subunit, strengthens this idea by alluding to the Torah with its references to "word" (דָּבָר) and "commandment" (מִצְוָה). The verse's placement in-between two proverbs featuring the term "life" (חַיִּים, vv. 12, 14) underscores the centrality of keeping the Torah if one would enjoy life with Yahweh.[62] This gives us yet another perspective according to which we are to understand the way of wisdom that leads to Edenic life. Torah and wisdom are bound together, such that wisdom's life-giving path can only be traversed by walking according to the Torah. Proverbs 13:12–19 thus brings the Torah (13:12–14) and the moral (13:14–19) dimensions of wisdom together. Where Proverbs 3:18 associated the tree of life with wisdom, and Proverbs 11:30 with both wisdom and righteousness, Proverbs 13:12–19 reaffirms these associations while also incorporating Torah into the equation.

These observations now position us to make sense of Proverbs 13:12's reference to עֵץ חַיִּים. This proverb contrasts the heart-sickening experience of a delayed hope with the satisfaction that comes from the tree of life. However, is this fulfillment of desire offered to everyone? While verse 12 itself lacks any wisdom, moral, or Torah-related terms, its function, as part of an *inclusio* framing verses 13–18, effectively implies that the tree of life belongs only to him who righteously walks in wisdom according to the instructions of the Torah.[63] Indeed, verse 12's preceding position beside verse 13 intimates that the עֵץ חַיִּים is, in fact, the reward promised to the one "who fears the commandment."[64] In the end, only the Davidic king who "rule[s] in wisdom and righteousness *by obeying* the Torah" will find his hopes and longings met by the promised, life-giving presence of Yahweh.[65]

2.4. Tree of Life in Proverbs 15:4

> A healing tongue is a tree of life,
> but crookedness in it is a crushing of the spirit. (Prov 15:4, my translation)

מַרְפֵּא לָשׁוֹן עֵץ חַיִּים וְסֶלֶף בָּהּ שֶׁבֶר בְּרוּחַ׃

Like the previous three passages examined, we must first reckon with Proverbs 15:4's literary and structural context, which pairs this verse alongside verse 5 as the centerpiece of a unit spanning verses 2–7.

[61] One chapter later, Proverbs 14:27 will echo 13:14 word-for-word, the only difference being its replacement of the phrase 13:14) תּוֹרַת חָכָם) with 14:27) יִרְאַת יְהוָה). Hence, "the fear of Yahweh" (יִרְאַת יְהוָה), which stands at the beginning of all true wisdom (Prov 1:7), likewise sits at the heart of the Torah; walking in wisdom and keeping the Torah share a common heartbeat in fearing Yahweh.

[62] Osborne, *Trees and Kings*, 100–101, writes: "These two parallel ideas [the tree of life, v. 12; the fountain of life, v. 14] are divided by 13:13, which states that those who fear the commandment of YHWH will be rewarded."

[63] Waltke, *Proverbs 1–15*, 563.

[64] Remarkably, in the book of Proverbs, the only two occurrences of יְשֻׁלָּם (the Pual imperfect 3ms form of the verb שָׁלַם) are in Proverbs 11:31 and 13:13. The former refers to a *righteous* man being rewarded, and the latter, to the rewarding of a man who keeps the *Torah*. Moreover, both verses *immediately follow* proverbs discussing עֵץ חַיִּים (11:30 and 13:12).

[65] Schreiner, *Kingdom of God*, 70 (emphasis original).

An *inclusio* in verses 2 and 7 may be discerned on the basis of syntactical, lexical, and thematic parallels. Syntactically and lexically speaking, the first line of each verse opens with a construct package featuring the plural noun "the wise" (חֲכָמִים), followed immediately by an imperfect verb taking "knowledge" (דָּעַת) as its direct object (לְשׁוֹן חֲכָמִים תֵּיטִיב דָּעַת, v. 2; שִׂפְתֵי חֲכָמִים יְזָרוּ דָעַת, v. 7). Similarly, the second line of each verse begins with a *vav* (ו) attached to yet another construct package, this one containing the plural noun "fools" (וּפִי כְסִילִים, v. 2; וְלֵב כְּסִילִים, v. 7). Thematically, these two bracketing verses share an emphasis on the dual subjects of wisdom and folly in relation to one's speech. Consequently, Proverbs 15:2–7 forms a chiasm:[66]

> A – v. 2: The <u>tongue</u> of the **wise** makes **knowledge** acceptable,
> but the <u>mouth</u> of **fools** spouts **folly**.
>
> > B – v. 3: The eyes of Yahweh are in every place,
> > watching the *evil* and the *good*.
> >
> > > C – v. 4: A healing <u>tongue</u> is a tree of life,
> > > but crookedness in <u>it</u> is a crushing of the spirit.
> >
> > > C' – v. 5: A **fool** rejects his father's **discipline**,
> > > but he who regards **reproof** is **prudent**.
> >
> > B' – v. 6: Great wealth is in the house of the *righteous*,
> > but trouble is in the income of the *wicked*.
>
> A' – v. 7: The <u>lips</u> of the **wise** spread **knowledge**,
> but the hearts of fools are not so.

Progressing inwardly along this chiasm, verses 3 and 6 correspond due to their shared use of moral terminology ("the evil and the good" [רָעִים וטוֹבִים, v. 3], "the righteous" [צַדִּיק, v. 6], "the wicked" [רָשָׁע, v. 6]), thereby leaving verses 4–5 in the middle. This central pairing dovetails back to the two themes stressed by the *inclusio* verses. Verse 4 repeats the catchword "tongue" (לָשׁוֹן), used earlier in verse 2, and returns to the theme of speech.[67] Verse 5 opens with the word "fool" (אֱוִיל), linking back to its cognate, "folly" (אִוֶּלֶת), from verse 2, while also utilizing other wisdom and folly-related language such as "discipline" (מוּסָר), "reproof" (תּוֹכַחַת), and "prudent" (יַעְרִם).

Proverbs 15:4's wider context is instructive in helping us understand how Solomon uses "tree of life" here. Both the *inclusio* of verses 2 and 7 as well as the chiastic placement of verses 4–5 intertwine the themes of wisdom and speech together, while verses 3 and 6 again weave the moral dimensions of wisdom and folly into this broader discourse. Thus, the "healing tongue," which verse 4 compares to עֵץ חַיִּים, likely refers to the speech of an upright man who has traveled well the way of wisdom, tasted of the Edenic life, drunken in deeply of Yahweh's covenant presence, and now "whets the appetite to restore

[66] In order to draw out the connections which establish this chiasm, I have underlined speech-related terms, bolded wisdom and folly-related terms, and italicized moral terms. All of these verses are my own translation.

[67] The word סֶלֶף in verse 4 may also carry a moral sense, connecting it thematically to verses 3 and 6. This noun only occurs twice in the Hebrew Bible—here, and earlier, in Prov 11:3, where it is contrasted with "the integrity of the upright" (תֻּמַּת יְשָׁרִים). See Steinmann, *Proverbs*, 286, 292.

Paradise in a broken world through healing speech that gives eternal life to those who 'eat' it."[68] Consequently, the Davidic king who has laid hold of עֵץ חַיִּים by grasping wisdom now himself become a branch-like extension, embodying the Torah through fruit-bearing righteous conduct and healing words of knowledge.

2.5. Synthesis

In the garden, Adam broke covenant with Yahweh when he partook of the forbidden fruit, resulting in his exile from the place of Yahweh's life-giving presence, as represented by the barring of access to the עֵץ חַיִּים tree of life. Through the Davidic Covenant, however, Yahweh has effectively passed on this Adamic role to the Davidic king, calling for faithful adherence to the Torah and promising an everlasting throne.[69] In the book of Proverbs, we find one Davidic king seeking to inculcate a future Davidic king with the covenantal wisdom of the Torah in order to ensure continued love and faithfulness before Yahweh. And one of the ways Solomon does this is by commending wisdom as the "tree of life" to his son. This metaphorical allusion sheds light upon the path leading back to the heart of Eden and Adam's pre-fall experience of covenant life in Yahweh's presence. This way of wisdom is the fruit of a righteous life lived in accordance with the Torah. It is a way of seeing and being in the world that imparts life to others in both speech and conduct. To walk in this way is to truly live as Yahweh had originally created Adam to do; and as Solomon now summons his son to do.

3. Conclusion

Solomon's four uses of "tree of life" in Proverbs 3:18, 11:30, 13:12, and 15:4 purposefully echo back to Genesis 1–3 and present the future Davidic king with the proper pathway towards re-entering the proverbial garden and walking with Yahweh once again. We see this both in the way that Solomon's Torah-shaped worldview and covenantal framework deeply influenced his proverbial addresses to his son, as well as through the broader literary and structural contexts that surround and inform our interpretation of all four of the proverbs in which עֵץ חַיִּים occurs.

[68] Waltke, *Proverbs 1–15*, 615. Throughout his commentary, Waltke consistently interprets עֵץ חַיִּים as a figurative representation of "perpetual healing insuring eternal life" (p. 105). While I do not necessarily disagree with this understanding, I would argue for a greater emphasis on the experience of Yahweh's life-giving presence. Since Yahweh is the source and sustainer of all life, it is his covenant presence that imparts eternal life to those who would walk faithfully before him. Thus, Gordan J. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15,* WBC 1A (Waco, TX: Word, 1987), 62, argues, "The golden candlestick kept in the tabernacle was a stylized tree of life; the fall of its light on the twelve loaves of the presence symbolized God's life sustaining the twelve tribes of Israel (Exod 25:31–35; Lev 24:1–9)." See also Morales, *Who Shall Ascend the Mountain*, 15–17.

[69] Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 455–56.

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Granted Life in Himself: Is It Plausible to See Eternal Generation in John 5:26?

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Abstract: Eternal generation once stood as a cornerstone of Christian theology, shaping our understanding of the Trinity, Christ, and salvation. Yet, it faces the charge of lacking scriptural support. This article hopes to provide an exegetical examination of John 5:26 to see if the text does provide a firm grounding for the doctrine of eternal generation and how it could shape our understanding of the doctrine.

Berkhof defines the doctrine of eternal generation as "that eternal and necessary act of the first person in the Trinity, whereby He, within the divine Being, is the ground of a second personal subsistence like His own, and puts this second person in possession of the whole divine essence, without any division, alienation, or change."[1] Irenaeus rightly says, "Since therefore His generation is unspeakable, those who strive to set forth generations and productions cannot be in their right mind, inasmuch as they undertake to describe things which are indescribable."[2]

Despite this doctrine's attempt to describe a divine incomprehensibility, Robert Letham rightly summarizes its historical acceptance: "Since Irenaeus, the church has held that the Father begat the Son in eternity."[3] Similarly, Bavinck describes the doctrine of eternal generation as a glorious necessity of the divine nature: "God is no abstract, fixed, monadic, solitary substance, but a plenitude of life. It is his nature (οὐσια) to be generative (γεννητικη) and fruitful (καρπογονος)."[4] He goes on to say, "Those who deny this fecund productivity fail to take seriously the fact that God is an infinite fullness of blessed life.… For if God cannot communicate himself, he is a darkened light, a dry spring, unable to exert himself outward to communicate himself to creatures."[5]

Since the nineteenth century, the doctrine has been highly questioned and rejected by those who claim it is unbiblical, unintelligible, and possibly introduces the Son's subordination to the Father. B. B. Warfield stands out as one of the first to leave the doctrine of eternal generation in his explanation of the Trinity.[6] Following Warfield, the doctrine of eternal generation became increasingly ignored and then rejected by many. Moreland and Craig echo a considerable number of contemporary scholars when they

[1] Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1938), 94.

[2] Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against Heresies* 2.28.6 (*ANF* 1:401).

[3] Robert Letham, *Systematic Theology* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2019), 114.

[4] Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), 2:308.

[5] Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2:308–9.

[6] B. B. Warfield, "Trinity," *ISBE* 5:2909–14. For a discussion of Warfield's position and its legacy, see Scott Swain, "B. B. Warfield and the Biblical Doctrine of the Trinity," *Themelios* 43.1 (2018): 10–24.

said, "although creedally affirmed, the doctrine of the generation of the Son (and the procession of the Spirit) is a relic of Logos Christology that finds virtually no warrant in the biblical text and introduces a subordinationism into the Godhead, which anyone who affirms the full deity of Christ ought to find very troubling."[7]

Undoubtedly, no doctrine should be received without biblical warrant. Fred Sanders rightly said, "The only argument capable of establishing the doctrine of eternal generation is a biblical argument, and the real warrant for believing eternal generation must be the warrant of a right interpretation of Scripture."[8] In this regard, John 5:26 has been identified as a *crux interpretum* for the doctrine of eternal generation.[9] As will be explored below, scholars remain divided on whether this text refers to an eternal grant of life to the Son from the Father or a grant from the Father which empowered the incarnate Son during his earthly ministry. Therefore, this study endeavors to examine John 5:26 as a potential textual ground for the doctrine of eternal generation.

This study hopes not only to bolster the doctrine's credibility but also stimulate further exegetical and theological insights in the discussion. Through this textual and theological analysis of the Scripture, I argue that it is plausible to maintain the historic doctrine of eternal generation rooted in John 5:26.[10] While there are other plausible interpretations of this passage, perhaps it is best to continue the historic understanding represented by Chrysostom who concludes that "'hath given' is the same as 'hath begotten.'"[11] Similarly, Hilary explains, "The Son draws His life from that Father Who truly has life; the Only-begotten from the Unbegotten, Offspring from Parent, Living from Living."[12] This would view John 5:26 in agreement with the Nicene portrayal of Christ as the eternal, begotten Son of the Father, of one substance with him.

1. Contextual Analysis of John 5:26

John's Gospel opens by introducing the eternal Word who was with God and was God (John 1:1). This majestic prologue sets the stage for the remainder of the narrative, which aims to bring readers to

[7] J. P. Moreland and William Lane Craig, *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview*, 2nd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2017), 593. See also John S. Feinberg, *No One Like Him: The Doctrine of God* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2001), 488–92.

[8] Fred Sanders, *Fountain of Salvation: Trinity and Soteriology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2023), 100.

[9] D. A. Carson, "John 5:26: *Crux Interpretum* for Eternal Generation" in *Retrieving Eternal Generation*, ed. Fred Sanders and Scott Swain (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2017), 79.

[10] Other passages are certainly worthy of attention. Especially within John's writing, the description of Christ as "Son" implies the existence of the Father and some relationship in which the Son is dependent upon the Father for life. This theme of the Son being from or proceeding from the Father is continued outside the Johannine corpus. In Colossians 1:15 the Son is described as "the image of the invisible God." The Son is "the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature" (Heb 1:3). The title "Son" implies a "from the Father" relationship. The Son's "Sonship" is described in Hebrews 1 as a divine category of being. He is "begotten" (1:5) and consequently better than the created angels. As Son he is to be worshipped and rule (1:6–8). The Son is God as well as the Father is God (1:9), but the Son is always the image of or radiating from the Father. The relationship is not reciprocal.

[11] John Chrysostom,"Homily 39" *Homilies on the Gospel of St. John* 39 (*NPNF* 14:137) Similarly, D. A. Carson was correct when he said, "I suspect the best explanation is an old one: this is an eternal grant. It is not a grant given to Jesus at some point in time, as if before that point he did not have life-in-himself" (D. A. Carson, *Jesus the Son of God* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012], 69).

[12] Hilary of Poitiers, *On the Trinity* 2.11 (*NPNF*2 9:55).

"believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name" (20:31). The prologue establishes that through this eternal divine Word "all things were made" and that "in him was life" (1:3–4). John portrays the Word as the source of life and grace, declaring, "From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace" (1:16). Crucially, the prologue identifies this life-giving Word in John 1:18 as "the only God who is at the Father's side" (μονογενὴς θεὸς ὁ ὢν εἰς τὸν κόλπον τοῦ πατρός).

In his Gospel, John consistently portrays Jesus as "the Son" or "the Son of God," emphasizing that Jesus shares in the divine essence and his intimate relationship with the Father. Nathanael confesses, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God" (1:49). Those who do not believe are condemned because "they have not believed in the name of the only Son of God" (3:18). It is "the Son" who declares what he has seen "in the Father's presence" (8:38), who makes people free (8:36). Lazarus was raised from the dead "so that the Son of God may be glorified through it (11:4). Martha confessed Jesus to be "the Messiah, the Son of God" (11:27). Jesus relates to "the Father" as "the Son" (14:13). He was again accused of blasphemy because "he claimed to be the Son of God" (19:7).

John pictures the divine Son as never isolated from the Father. The Son receives from the Father and shares from the Father. The Son's nature, life, and mission are gifts of the Father. The Father gives "all things" to the Son (3:35; 13:3). Jesus associates himself with "the gift of God" in John 4:10. Divine judgment is given to the Son (5:22, 27; 17:2). Jesus's works (5:27), his name (17:12), his glory (17:22, 24), and his life (5:26) are from the Father. Subsequently, Jesus gives the right to become children of God (1:12–13), "living water" (4:10), "life to the world" (6:33), and as God Jesus gives "a new commandment" to his disciples (13:34).

In John 5:18 the Jews seek to kill Jesus because "he was not only breaking the Sabbath but was also calling God his own Father, thereby making himself equal with God." In 5:19–23, Jesus maintains he is able to heal on the Sabbath because "whatever the Father does, the Son does likewise" (5:19), and these healings are only preparatory for the greater works the Son would do (5:20). The greater works culminate in the Son's gift of life to whomever he wishes (5:21, 24), judgment of all (5:22), and reception of worship (5:23). Jesus grounds these claims in his reception of the Father's gift. He says, "For just as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself, and he has given him authority to execute judgment because he is the Son of Man" (5:26).

2. Textual Analysis of John 5:26

John 5:26 serves as a crucial anchor in John's Gospel, as it reveals the christological foundation that shapes the evangelist's portrayal of Jesus as the divine Son. This verse highlights the unity between the Father and the Son that is possible because the Son has been granted "life in himself" from the Father's own self-existing nature. The following exegetical survey aims to illuminate John's high Christology, focusing particularly on what it means for Christ to be the Son of the Father.

2.1. "Life in Himself"

John 5:26 affirms that the Father possesses life intrinsically within himself (ζωὴν ἐν ἑαυτῷ). Thomas Aquinas clarifies this contrast, when he explained life in himself as "an essential, non-participated life."

God, then, is the "principle of life" (*principium vitae*).[13] Similarly, D. A. Carson explains that the phrase, "life in himself," means that "God is self-existent; he is always 'the living God.' Mere human beings are derived creatures; our life comes from God, and he can remove it as easily as he gave it. But to the Son, and to the Son alone, God has imparted life-in-himself."[14] God is the very essence of life, deriving existence from none, for he is the "I AM" (Exod 3:14; 33:19), the uncaused Cause from whom all things originate and depend, as affirmed in Romans 11:36: "For from him and through him and to him are all things." Acts 17:25 further expounds on this theme as Paul says, "nor is He served by human hands, as though He needed anything, since He Himself gives to all people life and breath and all things."

A striking parallel emerges between John 5:26 and 6:57, as both passages unequivocally affirm the Father as the fountain of life, and the Son as the one who receives and derives his life from the Father. Therefore, "life in himself" describes the Father's self-existent, uncreated life, distinct from the contingent, derived life of all created beings. As Barrett explains, "Life in himself refers to the divine attribute of aseity. As the self-existent, self-sufficient, infinite and eternal God, the Creator in no way depends on something or someone external to himself, such as his creation or his creatures. Put positively, he not only has but *is* life in and of himself."[15]

Bavinck described God's aseity as "absolute being" and that "God is the real, the true being, the fullness of being, the sum total of all reality and perfection, the totality of being, from which all other being owes its existence. He is an immeasurable and unbounded ocean of being; the absolute being who alone has being in himself."[16] Bavinck went on to explain that since God is "absolute being," he is also "eternally and absolutely independent in his existence, in his perfections, in all his works, the first and the last, the sole cause and final goal of all things. In this aseity of God, conceived not only as having being from himself but also as the fullness of being, all the other perfections are included."[17] Divine aseity entails that the Father eternally enjoys the full plenitude of the blessed life. The question, to be addressed now, is how does the Son partake of this same "life in Himself"? This question reveals the crux of the matter, inviting us to delve into the depths of the inscrutable mystery of the Trinitarian life.

2.2. The Gift

John 5:26 continues, "just as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself" (ὥσπερ γὰρ ὁ πατὴρ ἔχει ζωὴν ἐν ἑαυτῷ, οὕτως καὶ τῷ υἱῷ ἔδωκεν ζωὴν ἔχειν ἐν ἑαυτῷ). "Just as" (ὥσπερ) is a "marker of similarity between events and states."[18] This requires the reader to draw a correspondence between the two statements. John wants his readers to recognize there is a connection and similarity between the Father who "has life in himself" and the Son who "has life in himself." This link between the Father's life and the Son's life is strengthened by the words ούτως καί, translated "so" (NRSV) or more fully "in this manner."[19]

[13] Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Gospel of John*, trans. Fr. Fabian R. Larcher, O.P., vol. 35, *Latin/English of the Works of St. Thomas Aquinas* (Lander, WY: The Aquinas Institute for the Study of Sacred Doctrine), 5.L5. n782.

[14] D. A. Carson, *The Gospel according to John*, PNTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 256.

[15] Matthew Barrett, *Canon, Covenant and Christology: Rethinking Jesus and the Scriptures of Israel*, NSBT 51 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2020), 259.

[16] Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2:123.

[17] Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics,* 2:152.

[18] BDAG, s.v. " ὥσπερ."

[19] BDAG, s.v. " οὕτως."

"Life in himself" is that which is given (ἔδωκεν) from the Father to the Son. In other words, the Father "has granted (the privilege) of having life."[20] While the phrase is found nowhere else in Scripture, the idea of the Son's reception of "life in himself" resonates throughout John's writings. The Son is the eternal Word who is whatever the Father is (John 1:1). The Son's glory is that of the "the glory as of a father's only Son [δόξαν ὡς μονογενοῦς παρὰ πατρός], full of grace and truth" (1:14). Jesus's works were "from the Father" (10:32). Furthermore, the Son is "in the Father" and the Father is "in the Son" (14:11).[21]

For the Father to have given (ἔδωκεν*)* life to the Son demands that there is something shared from the Father to the Son. Popkes notes that " δίδωμι is the most common expression for the procedure whereby a subject deliberately transfers something to someone or something so that it becomes available to the recipient."[22] Popkes goes on to argue that in John's Gospel and letters "giving is an aspect of the divine activity."[23]

This "gift" is in the aorist tense, which could lead the reader away from an eternal act. Meyer says, "The following ἔδωκεν (ver. 27) should itself have prevented the reference to the eternal generation"[24] Similarly, Bernard argues that "since the Father gives to the incarnate Son is common in John … it is better to interpret ἔδωκεν as in the other passages in the Gospel, where it is applied to the Father's gifts to Christ as manifested in the flesh."[25] The use of the aorist tense, however, does not necessarily exclude an "eternal grant" of life from the Father to the Son. A. T. Robinson explains that "gave" (ἐδωκεν) here should be seen as a "timeless aorist active indicative."[26] The timeless or gnomic aorist "is a universal or timeless aorist and probably represents the original timelessness of the aorist indicative."[27] Both the present and aorist tense can be used at times when "the event described is seen to be outside of temporal considerations."[28] This "timeless" aspect is often found in "sustained theological passages."[29]

[20] BDAG, s.v. " δίδωμι."

[21] In 1 John 1:1–2, John underscores the Son 's identity as the "Word of Life," emphasizing how "the life was made manifest" through him. Furthermore, John portrays the Son as "the eternal life, which was with the Father and was made manifest to us." Expanding on this concept, John later delves into the salvific implications of the Father's bestowal of "life in himself" upon the Son. In 1 John 5:11–12, he said, "And this is the testimony: God gave us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life."

[22] *EDNT*, s.v. " δίδωμι."

[23] *EDNT*, s.v. " δίδωμι."

[24] Heinrich August Wilhelm Meyer, *Critical and Exegetical Handbook to the Gospel of John*, ed. Frederick Crombie, trans. William Urwick, vol. 1 of *Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1874), 251.

[25] J. H. Bernard, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to St. John*, ed. Alan Hugh McNeile, ICC (New York: Scribners, 1929), 243.

[26] A. T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament* (Nashville: Broadman, 1933), John 5:26.

[27] A. T. Robertson, *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research* (Nashville: Broadman, 1934), 836.

[28] Stanley E. Porter, *Idioms of the Greek New Testament* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1999), 33.

[29] Porter, *Idioms of the Greek New Testament*, 39. Perhaps this "timeless aorist" is also seen in John 5:27, καὶ ἐξουσίαν ἔδωκεν αὐτῷ κρίσιν ποιεῖν, ὅτι υἱὸς ἀνθρώπου ἐστίν. The authority given from Father to Son has a timeless element in that it has been given, is now in effect, and will be executed with finality at the judgment. John 6:31 quotes from Psalm 78:24 (LXX 77:24) and says ἄρτον ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ ἔδωκεν αὐτοῖς φαγεῖν. The manna was repeatedly given and Jesus claimed to be the true bread of heaven. This is a timeless gift since the true bread continues to "give life to the world" (John 6:33).

On John 5:26, Augustine writes, "Therefore, when it says, 'He has given to the Son' it is as if he said, 'He begat a Son,' since the Father gave by begetting. Just as the Father gave the son *to be*, he also gave him to be *life* and he gave him to be life *in himself*."[30] Elsewhere Augustine says, "The Father did not give life to the Son already existing without life, but so begot Him apart from time that the life which the Father gave to the Son by begetting is co-eternal with the life of the Father who gave."[31]

Hilary of Poitiers offers this explanation of John 5:26: "He bore witness that life, to the fullest extent, is His gift from the living God. Now if the living Son was born from the living Father, that birth took place without a new nature coming into existence."[32] He goes on to say, "Life, which receives its birth from Life, must needs, because of that unity of nature and because of the mysterious event of that perfect and ineffable birth, live always in Him that lives and have the life of the Living in Himself."[33] Hilary's comments highlight several key aspects of the eternal generation: (1) The Son possesses the same divine life as the Father from all eternity; (2) this life is entirely complete and perfect in the Son; (3) the Son's life is derived from and dependent upon the Father as its eternal source; and (4) the Son shares in the Father's divine substance but is also to be recognized as a distinct subsistence or person.

Since Calvin, several scholars have rejected the more traditional understanding that the Son's reception of "life in himself" refers to his eternal filial relationship with the Father. Calvin insists on the Son's aseity apart from the Father's aseity so that the Son was *autotheos*.[34] Calvin, in his commentary on John says, "The meaning of the words is this: 'God did not choose to have life hidden, and, as it were, buried within himself, and therefore he poured it into his Son, that it might flow to us.' Hence we conclude, that this title is strictly applied to Christ, so far as he was manifested in the flesh."[35] Calvin reiterates his position in the *Institutes*: "For there he is properly speaking not of those gifts which he had in the Father's presence from the beginning, but of those with which he was adorned in that very flesh wherein he appeared."[36] Calvin goes on to say that John 5:26 should be seen as proof that the "fullness of life" dwells in Christ's humanity.[37] Several interpreters, following Calvin, have argued this text refers to the Son's incarnation.[38]

Raymond Brown, for example, contends the text speaks of the Son's authoritative "power to give life" rather than addressing the inner life of the Trinity.[39] Plummer claims, "The Eternal Generation of

[30] Augustine, *Tractates on the Gospel of John* 22.10.3–4; cited in Joel C. Elowsky, ed., *John 1–10*, ACCSNT 4A (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 198.

[31] Augustine, *The Trinity* 15.26.47, ed. Hermigild Dressler, trans. Stephen McKenna, The Fathers of the Church 45 (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1963), 517.

[32] Hilary of Poitiers, *On the Trinity* 8.7.27 (*NPNF*2 9:130).

[33] Hilary of Poitiers, *On the Trinity* 8.7.27 (*NPNF*2 9:130).

[34] A discussion of Calvin's hesitance to speak on Trinitarian metaphysics can be found at Arie Baars, *Om Gods verhevenheid en Zijn nabijheid: De Drie-eenheid bij Calvijn* (Kampen: Kok, 2004), 291–308.

[35] John Calvin, *Commentary on the Gospel according to John*, vol 1 trans. William Pringle, reprint ed. (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2010), 207.

[36] John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* 4.17.9, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, Library of Christian Classics (Philadelphia: Westminster John Knox Press, 1960), 1369.

[37] Calvin, *Institutes* 4.17.9.

[38] See Bernard, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to St. John*, 1:213, 243; Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* 4.17.9; Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology* (New York: Scribner, 1871–1873; repr., Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), 1:470–71; R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. John's Gospel* (Columbus, OH: Wartburg, 1942), 393–94, 498–501.

[39] Raymond Brown, *The Gospel According to John I–XII*, AB 29 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1966), 215.

the Son from the Father is not here in question; it is the Father's communication of Divine attributes to the Incarnate Word that is meant."[40] Both interpretations seem to suggest that John 5:26 is primarily concerned with the Son's functional reception of life-giving power and authority from the Father, specifically in relation to his incarnate mission, rather than directly addressing the metaphysical realities of the eternal relationship between the Son and the Father within the immanent Trinity.

However, several contemporary scholars maintain something closer to the historic position.[41] Kruse sees that to "have life in himself" must be a reference to Christ's deity rather than to the incarnation. He writes, "Saying that God has granted the Son to have life in himself is another way of saying he shares in divinity."[42] Similarly, Whitacre says,

> The deity of Christ is clear from the fact that the Father *has granted the Son to have life in himself* (v. 26). That is, the Son himself is the source of life and not just an agent of God's power of life. Yet this possession of life was given by the Father (*edōken*). So again, we have glimpses into the mystery of the relations within the Godhead and an emphasis on the gracious giving of the Father, who is the source of all.[43]

This sounds similar to Bavinck, who says, "The Father eternally gives to the Son, and with him to the Spirit, to have life in himself (John 5:26)."[44]

D. A. Carson argues that the Son's reception of life must refer to the Son's eternal reception of life and "cannot mean that the Son gained this prerogative only after the incarnation."[45] He continues, "The Prologue has already asserted of the pre-incarnate Word, 'In him was life' (1:4). The impartation of life-in-himself to the Son must be an act belonging to eternity, of a piece with the eternal Father/Son relationship, which is itself of a piece with the relationship between the Word and God, a relationship that existed 'in the beginning' (1:1)."[46] Carson's argument is centered on the eternal Father/Son relationship rather than the incarnate life. Carson rightly points the reader back to John 1:4, which affirms the Son's eternal possession of life rather than reception of life at some point. If this reception of life by the Son is identical to the Father's possession of "life in himself," then it seems this must be an "eternal reception" rather than a single act or event in the past.

If the Son receives a life in himself resembling the Father's life in himself, it cannot pertain to an incarnate life, as the Father does not possess an incarnate life to bestow. Moreover, the issue at hand is not solely the Son's incarnation. The entirety of John 5 revolves around the Son's deity. He unequivocally claims equality with God (5:18). Subsequent verses furnish evidence for his divine assertion rather than his incarnation or genuine humanity. Thus, it appears evident that this reference pertains to the Son's eternal divine life, bestowed by the Father.

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[40] Alfred Plummer, *The Gospel according to St John, with Maps, Notes and Introduction*, CGTSC (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1896), 139.

[41] The doctrine of eternal generation has experienced a resurgence among exegetes and theologians. See Sanders and Swain, *Retrieving Eternal Generation*.

[42] Colin G. Kruse, *John: An Introduction and Commentary*, rev. ed., TNTC 4 (London: InterVarsity Press, 2017), 175.

[43] Rodney A. Whitacre, *John*, IVPNTC 4 (Westmont, IL: IVP Academic, 1999), 131.

[44] Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2:342.

[45] Carson, *The Gospel according to John*, 256–57.

[46] Carson, *The Gospel according to John*, 256–57.

Furthermore, the Father's gift of eternal life to the Son cannot be said have a beginning without risking the error of Arianism. If eternal life began to be given to the Son, this would imply "there was a time when the Son was not" and undermine the Son's full participation in the divine essence. As Kruse argues, "Only God has life *in himself* and saying that God has granted the Son to have life in himself is another way of saying he shares in divinity."[47] The Son could not begin to be divine. Therefore, the Son eternally shares in the Father's divine nature (John 1:1). As Hamilton says, "The Father has *always* been granting the Son 'to have life in himself' (5:26), and the Father has always loved the Son and shown him what 'he himself is doing' (v. 20). If this were not so, there would have been a time when Jesus did not have life in himself, when he was therefore less than the Father."[48]

Moreover, Jesus does not address his human nature in this section, and his human nature is not in question. Other prophets, through the power of God, had performed great works. Jesus claims that "God was his own Father, making himself equal with God" (John 5:18), and defends this claim in the subsequent verses. In defense of his deity, Jesus explains that his actions reflect "what he sees the Father doing" (5:19), the Father's eternal love of the Son (5:20), and the divine abilities to raise the dead (5:21, 25; cf. Deut 32:39) and judge (John 5:22). Furthermore, the Son is to be honored alongside the Father (5:23). Whoever hears the Son's words—since he is true God—"does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life" (5:24). He refers to himself as "the Son" (5:20), "the Son of God" (5:25), and "the Son of Man" who sovereignly judges (5:26–27; cf. Dan 7:13).

It seems Jesus's statement in John 5:26 should be taken to refer to his divine nature rather than to the human nature. Köstenberger and Swain rightly conclude, "Jesus' claim that he possesses the power to 'give life' is a claim to the title of the one Lord God of Israel."[49] It is because Jesus shares in the divine nature, that he is able to do the things listed in John 5. The discourse reveals Jesus' deity through his works and his unique relationship with the Father. As Swain said, "It is the Son's eternal reception of and attention to the Father's name, the Father's life, the Father's words, and the Father's face that qualifies the Son in time to proclaim the Father's name and grant eternal life."[50]

A discernible pattern emerges within John's text. This pattern begins with the Father's act of sharing with the Son. The Son receives life, name, and authority, all of which are bestowed in a manner that equates them with those of the Father. "The Son performs the works of the one true God as God. But he performs them as a Son who is absolutely dependent upon his father in every respect."[51] In this way, "What John makes explicit everywhere is that the *kind* of ordered, obedient agency that presupposes an *equal status* between sender and sent one is the kind that obtains pre-eminently between a father and a son, between *the* Father and *the* Son. *The kind of agency exhibited by Jesus in John's Gospel is a distinctly divine-filial agency.*"[52] The Son can give life precisely because he has received life from the Father. Or as

[47] Kruse, *John*, 175.

[48] James M. Hamilton Jr., "John," in *John–Acts*, ESV Expository Commentary 9 (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2019), 116.

[49] Andreas J. Köstenberger and Scott R. Swain, *Father, Son and Spirit: The Trinity and John's Gospel*, ed. D. A. Carson, NSBT 24 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2008), 117.

[50] Scott R. Swain, "John," in *The Trinity in the Canon*, ed. Brandon Smith (Grand Rapids: B&H, 2023), 201.

[51] Andreas J. Köstenberger and Scott R. Swain, *Father, Son and Spirit*, 118.

[52] Andreas J. Köstenberger and Scott R. Swain, *Father, Son and Spirit*, 121.

Bultmann concluded, "In a certain sense v. 26 goes a step further behind the statement in v. 21, and so gives ground for it: the Son exercises the office of Judge because he shares in the divine nature."[53]

3. Concluding Reflections

It seems John 5:26 teaches that whatever the Son received is something which the Father already eternally possessed. Whatever it means for the Father to "have life in himself" must also be said of the Son as he receives this life from the Father. The Son's life includes the infinite plenitude of divinity while also being the life that eternally and necessarily proceeds from the Father. In this way, the Son does not possess a separate or distinct divine substance from the Father. Rather, as Son, he fully participates in and shares the one, undivided divine essence and life.

The understanding that the Father's grant refers only to the Son's incarnation and incarnate work faces formidable challenges on at least three fronts. First, the Father's possession of "life in Himself" is an inherent, eternal attribute of his divine nature, not something acquired or bestowed upon him at a particular point in time. Second, if the "life in Himself" granted to the Son were to be understood as the life he assumed in the incarnation, it would imply that the pre-incarnate Son did not possess this divine life, prerogatives, or powers prior to his incarnation. Finally, if Christ received "life in himself" at the incarnation, it seems this would clash with the eternal, immutable nature of the Father's divine life and the Son's eternal co-existence and co-equality with the Father.

Instead, it seems safer to remain with the understanding that John 5:26 affirms the eternal generation of the Son. From John 5:26, John Owen said, "Whatever belongs unto the person of the Son, as the person of the Son, he receives it all from the Father by eternal generation…. He is therefore the essential image of the Father, because all the properties of the divine nature are communicated unto him together with personality—from the Father."[54] From John 5:26 it can be seen that "Jesus claims unprecedented ontological unity and equality with the Father (e.g. 5:19, 26)."[55] Perhaps the extra-biblical language of eternal generation may not be preferred by some, but it seems difficult to find a better phrase to describe the Son's eternal reception of the Father's *a se* life.

[53] Bultmann, Rudolf. *Das Evangelium des Johannes* (Kritisch-exegetischer Kommentar über das Neue Testament, 4). Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1941), 260.

[54] John Owen, ΧΡΙΣΤΟΛΟΓΙΑ*: Or, A Declaration of the Glorious Mystery of the Person of Christ—God and Man*, ed. William H. Goold, The Works of John Owen (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1852), 71–72.

[55] Barrett, *Canon, Covenant and Christology,* 256.

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Faith and the Future: The Role of the Believer in the Gospel of John

— Todd R. Chipman —

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Abstract: John's lexical and grammatical choices portray his vision for how believers should respond to God's revelation in his Son. John uses the articular substantival participle in a way that can best be described as a role John would have believers embrace or reject to demonstrate their allegiance to Jesus. Effectively, these articular substantival participles are like roles in the Jesus drama. In his Gospel, John writes πιστεύω as an articular substantival participle nineteen times. Nearly half of these John collocates with references to eternal life. In this essay, I employ four headings to describe John's collocation of πιστεύω as an articular substantival participle and references to eternal life in his Gospel: (1) New Birth, Believing, and Eternal Life (John 3:15, 16, 36); (2) Believing Jesus's Words and Eternal Life (John 5:24); (3) Believing, Satisfaction of Hunger and Thirst, and Eternal Life (John 6:35, 40, 47); and (4) Believing, Resurrection, and Eternal Life (John 11:25, 26). I conclude that John's description of the role of the believer portrays the quality of eternal life available to Jesus's followers before natural death and the quantity of life they will enjoy with God after natural death. I argue that John's now-and-forever framework of eternal life emboldens believers to testify of Jesus before natural death since they are sure of what they will enjoy with him in eternity.[1]

How John describes God and the Christian experience of God has captivated readers throughout the Christian era. Whether reading the Gospel of John, one of John's letters, or the Revelation, we cannot escape John's pastoral heart. John is not just an eyewitness of Jesus. He also writes as one who thought about all that Jesus accomplished and the implications of Jesus's actions for those who would believe in him and those who would reject him.

John's intimacy with Jesus is a theological blessing and a scholarly problem. Believers have access to deep wells of Johannine theology, always serving fresh water for our relationship with God. But that depth creates problems for scholars seeking to equip believers to interpret all that John says—and how he says it. How should we understand the relationship between John's writings? What should we do with the varying emphases on Christian doctrine and practice? Concerning contemporary church life, how can we categorize John's statements about Christian fellowship in ways that might foster participation

[1] This essay is the result of research presented in the New Testament Greek Language and Exegesis Section at the 2024 ETS Annual Meeting on 21 November. I am grateful for the feedback attendees offered there.

in the body of Christ? These questions demonstrate that John's descriptions of the Christian experience are both academic and practical. Therefore, we must look at what John says about participating in the Christian movement with a keen eye to how he writes.

In this essay, I look at one lexeme John uses for human agency in his Gospel. There, John repeatedly collocates the articular substantival participle of πιστεύω[2] with the concept of eternal life (3:15, 16, 36; 5:24; 6:35, 40, 47; 11:25, 26). These nine occurrences make up nearly half of the nineteen total occurrences of the articular substantival participle of πιστεύω in John, objectifying John's portrayal of faith and the future believers will enjoy with God in this life and the next.

Ronald D. Peters analyzes the functional implications of the Greek article, including its presence with the participle.[3] Peters employs the metaphor of the theater to describe how the presence or absence of the article moves a noun on or off stage. He writes:

> In the case of the article, when a Greek speaker wishes to move a participant to the background of the stage, he or she may do so in part by characterizing the participant as abstract. Conversely, when a speaker wishes to bring a participant to the foreground of the stage, the participant will be characterized as concrete. Thus, even in a single episode, participants will move in and out, to the front and to the back, based on their immediate role.[4]

A speaker or writer might thus employ an article not only to concretize the subject of the participle but also to move them to center stage. Recognizing what Peters states about an author's use of the Greek definite article helps us understand John's frequent use of this grammatical structure. I suggest that John's use of the article to substantivize participles is akin to a playwright using bold font to identify roles in a script. The actors participate on stage by fulfilling the roles the playwright composes. John uses the definite article to portray participles as roles his readers should embrace or reject as they respond to God's revelation in Jesus.

One role that John uses the articular substantival participle to portray is that of the believer, and he augments this role with a future-time orientation. The believer in Jesus follows him now in light of what is to come. John emphasizes the afterlife experience during which believers in Jesus will continue to relate with him, experiencing the fullness of their saving faith. This future orientation does not discount Jesus's statement in John 17:3, where he underscores the believer's experience of eternal life even before natural death. There, Jesus prays, "And this is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent."[5] By the time Jesus offers his prayer of fulfillment in John 17,

[2] πιστεύω (31.35: Hold a View, Believe, Trust in Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains*, 2nd ed. [New York: United Bible Societies, 1989], 1:369). John writes verbal forms of πιστεύω nearly one hundred times and only sparsely uses the noun πίστις (never in his Gospel) or adjective πιστός. John's favoring of the verbal form distinguishes his idiolect from other NT writers. Moisés Silva notes that, across the NT, the noun and verb forms are about equal in frequency (" πιστεύω," *NIDNTTE* 3:65).

[3] Ronald D. Peters, *The Greek Article: A Functional Grammar of* ὁ*-Items in the Greek New Testament with Special Emphasis on the Greek Article*, Linguistic Biblical Studies 9 (Boston: Brill, 2014), 67.

[4] Peters, *The Greek Article*, 190.

[5] Unless noted otherwise, all English translations are from the ESV. All references to the Greek text of the NT are from Kurt Aland et al., *Novum Testamentum Graece*, 28th ed. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2012).

John has already portrayed the after-physical-life orientation of faith, often portrayed via the articular substantival participle of πιστεύω.[6]

In what follows, I use four headings to analyze the nine articular substantival participles of πιστεύω in the Gospel of John:

(1) New Birth, Believing, and Eternal Life (3:15, 16, 36)
(2) Believing Jesus's Words and Eternal Life (5:24)
(3) Believing, Satisfaction of Hunger and Thirst, and Eternal Life (6:35, 40, 47)
(4 Believing, Resurrection, and Eternal Life (11:25, 26)

I will then reflect on the relationship between the quality of eternal life available to Jesus's followers before their natural death (as Jesus states in John 17:3) and the quantity of eternal life Jesus promises his followers will experience after natural death. I offer here that the articular substantival participle of πιστεύω in John emphasizes the period of eternal life after physical death, emboldening those embracing the role of the believer to testify despite being opposed because of their faith. Certain of the quantity of eternal life they will enjoy with God after natural death, believers boldly testify to the quality of eternal life they experience in knowing God even before their natural death.

1. New Birth, Believing, and Eternal Life

John 3:15	ἵνα πᾶς ὁ πιστεύων ἐν αὐτῷ ἔχῃ ζωὴν αἰώνιον.	that whoever **believes** in him may have eternal life.
John 3:16	οὕτως γὰρ ἠγάπησεν ὁ θεὸς τὸν κόσμον, ὥστε τὸν υἱὸν τὸν μονογενῆ ἔδωκεν, ἵνα πᾶς ὁ πιστεύων εἰς αὐτὸν μὴ ἀπόληται ἀλλ᾽ ἔχῃ ζωὴν αἰώνιον.	For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever **believes** in him should not perish but have eternal life.
John 3:36	ὁ πιστεύων εἰς τὸν υἱὸν ἔχει ζωὴν αἰώνιον· ὁ δὲ ἀπειθῶν τῷ υἱῷ οὐκ ὄψεται ζωήν, ἀλλ᾽ ἡ ὀργὴ τοῦ θεοῦ μένει ἐπ᾽ αὐτόν.	**Whoever believes** in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him.

Jesus's interaction with Nicodemus in John 3 provides a framework for understanding Jesus's concept of faith as a conscious commitment to his message with a view to eternal life. In the dramatic dialogue of John 3:1–13, Jesus gently chastises the teacher of Israel for not knowing the Old Testament teaching about the need to be born from above to enter the kingdom of God. And in John 3:14, Jesus turns Nicodemus's attention again to the Old Testament, comparing himself with the snake Moses

[6] Grant R. Osborne observes John's collocation of πιστεύω and eternal life, stating, "In John's Gospel life results from the individual coming to 'belief' in Jesus and is the true purpose of this Gospel (Jn 20:31)," and continuing, "The divine encounter of the sinner with the light and life of God in Jesus produces conviction of sin, and there ensues a call to believe—synonyms: receiving him (Jn 1:12; 3:11, 33; 4:36; 5:43), coming to him (Jn 5:40; 6:35, 44; 7:34, 37; 8:21), drinking the living water (Jn 4:13–14; 6:35, 53–56; 7:37–38). For this Gospel, 'faith' contains its own *ordo salutis*, 'seeing' (114x) and 'knowing' (141x) are not part of the process that results in faith but rather are constituent elements of faith itself. Divine sovereignty and human responsibility function together in the act of coming to faith. The result is life" ("Life, Eternal Life," *DJG* (2nd ed.) 521).

raised in the desert in Numbers 21. After Edom denied Israel passage, the people had to take an extended southern detour and complained against the Lord because they judged his food and water supply insufficient. The Lord sent snakes among the people, and many were killed. He told Moses to craft a snake and raise it on a pole so that anyone who looked upon it would be saved. Jesus tells Nicodemus that the Son of Man would likewise be raised as the object of salvation, "that **whoever believes** [πᾶς ὁ πιστεύων] in him may have eternal life" (John 3:15).[7]

Jesus identifies himself as God's Son, the object of belief for all who would receive eternal life, saying, "**Whoever believes** [πᾶς ὁ πιστεύων] in him should not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16).[8] Though the Israelites looked upon the elevated snake only on that occasion of judgment and deliverance, Jesus bids Nicodemus to take up the role of the believer and fix a settled gaze upon himself. John concludes the third chapter of his Gospel by noting in John 3:36 the antithesis between the roles of faith and disbelief in Jesus: "**Whoever believes** [ὁ πιστεύων] in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him."[9]

2. Believing Jesus's Words and Eternal Life

John 5:24	Ἀμὴν ἀμὴν λέγω ὑμῖν ὅτι ὁ τὸν λόγον μου ἀκούων καὶ πιστεύων τῷ πέμψαντί με ἔχει ζωὴν αἰώνιον καὶ εἰς κρίσιν οὐκ ἔρχεται, ἀλλὰ μεταβέβηκεν ἐκ τοῦ θανάτου εἰς τὴν ζωήν.	Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and **believes** him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life.

Jesus's miraculous healing of the lame man at the pool of Bethesda in John 5:1–15 outrages his opponents. They want to kill him because he healed on the Sabbath (5:16). The rest of the chapter (5:17–47) is Jesus's defense of his Sabbath ministry. Because he is God in the flesh, he is not bound by the contemporary Jewish leadership's interpretation of the Sabbath. Jesus's declaration that he is free

[7] Daniel B. Wallace notes that the present articular substantival participle of πιστεύω occurs six times more frequently than the aorist, surfacing especially in sociological contexts. "The present was the tense of choice most likely because the NT writers by and large saw *continual* belief as a necessary condition of salvation" (*Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996], 621 n. 22).

[8] Eckhard J. Schnabel captures the idea, writing, "The person who believes (ὁ πιστεύων) is the person who accepts and acknowledges and commits to Jesus. The focus on the individual, which is reflected in the formulation with a singular nominalized participle, follows from the fact that the fundamental characteristic of faith is the encounter with Jesus which causes faith" (*New Testament Theology* [Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2023], 724).

[9] Adolf Schlatter describes the contrasting roles of belief and unbelief, stating, "The basic inclination of a person comes to light in faith or unbelief and thus the divine judgment is included as a completed fact in the division of humanity into believers and non-believers, and this because faith and unbelief are the results of human willing and action that are brought about by divine action, in a just sequence. Since faith in its origin entails a divine action, that drawing and teaching by God whereby faith comes about and, furthermore, is followed by a comprehensive divine action, namely the entire gift of life, the refusal of faith places the one affected by this refusal outside the realm of divine giving; the person in question is thereby marked not only as being forfeited to judgment someday, but even now is placed under it. Faith, by contrast, experiences in the origin and gift of one's faith a divine giving that in free goodness has removed one from the divine judgment" (*Faith in the New Testament: A Study in Biblical Theology*, trans. Joseph Longarino [Bellingham, WA: Lexham Academic, 2022], 152).

from Sabbath strictures because he is God in the flesh further irritates the Jewish leadership, and they set out to take his life (5:18).

John 5 encapsulates one of the many features of Johannine irony. While Jesus's opponents want to kill him, Jesus preaches about giving eternal life. As the Gospel of John progresses, the juxtaposition of Jesus's death and the offer of eternal life become one framework for interpreting Jesus's mission (11:45–54; 12:23–28, 44–50; 17:1–3). In the immediate context of John 5, Jesus collocates eternal life with the roles of hearing his word and believing in the Father who sent him: "Truly, truly I say to you, **whoever** hears my word and **believes** [ὁ τὸν λόγον μου ἀκούων καὶ πιστεύων] him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life" (5:24). Christopher Seglenieks observes that John frequently uses πιστεύω in contexts that bid the hearers make a choice or response concerning Jesus. John's continual portrait of individuals making choices in relation to Jesus reinforces the dramatic tenor of John's Gospel. He uses the articular substantival participle to portray specific roles various individuals choose to embrace or reject.[10]

3. Believing, Satisfaction of Hunger and Thirst, and Eternal Life

John 6:35	εἶπεν αὐτοῖς ὁ Ἰησοῦς· ἐγώ εἰμι ὁ ἄρτος τῆς ζωῆς· ὁ ἐρχόμενος πρὸς ἐμὲ οὐ μὴ πεινάσῃ , καὶ ὁ πιστεύων εἰς ἐμὲ οὐ μὴ διψήσει πώποτε.	Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and **whoever believes** in me shall never thirst.
John 6:40	τοῦτο γάρ ἐστιν τὸ θέλημα τοῦ πατρός μου, ἵνα πᾶς ὁ θεωρῶν τὸν υἱὸν καὶ πιστεύων εἰς αὐτὸν ἔχῃ ζωὴν αἰώνιον, καὶ ἀναστήσω αὐτὸν ἐγὼ [ἐν] τῇ ἐσχάτῃ ἡμέρᾳ.	For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and **believes** in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day.
John 6:47	Ἀμὴν ἀμὴν λέγω ὑμῖν, ὁ πιστεύων ἔχει ζωὴν αἰώνιον.	Truly, truly, I say to you, **whoever believes** has eternal life.

In John 6, each use of ὁ πιστεύων includes Jesus's promise of an eternal blessing. The chapter begins with John's account of Jesus feeding the 5,000 (6:1–15). In John 6:22–71, the apostle records Jesus's explanation of the feeding miracle. The crowds Jesus fed follow after him and ask Jesus to continue to provide them bread from heaven (6:34). "Jesus said to them, 'I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and **whoever believes** [ὁ πιστεύων] in me shall never thirst" (6:35). Jesus pairs πεινάω (hunger) and διψάω (thirst) to underscore his teaching as essential and satisfying. The one taking up the role of believing in Jesus enjoys unending, eternal spiritual satisfaction.[11]

The crowd does not respond faithfully to Jesus's generosity in the feeding miracle. Jesus responds by stating his mission as the Son of God. The Father sent the Son to reveal God and save those the Father

[10] Christopher Seglenieks, "The Meaning of Πιστεύω in the Gospel of John," in *The Future of Gospels and Acts Research*, ed Peter G. Bolt, CGAR 3 (Macquarie Park, NSW: SCD Press, 2021), 243.

[11] D. A. Carson notes that the double emphatic ου μή with the future indicative διψησει modified further by the temporal adverb πώποτε in John 6:35 removes from the believer any thought of future spiritual lack such that, "it is the person who *believes in* him (Jesus) who does not thirst" (*The Gospel According to John*, PNTC [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991], 288, italics original).

gave to the Son (John 6:36–39). The Father's will is that "everyone **who** looks on the Son and **believes** [πᾶς ὁ ... πιστεύων] in him should have eternal life" (6:40). Jesus coordinates the roles of beholding the Son and believing in him via the use of one definite article (ὁ) governing both substantival participles. The crowds behold Jesus's miraculous ability to multiply food but do not connect it with belief. The purpose of Jesus's miraculous, divine abilities is that those beholding him would believe and grasp eternal life. For those in the role of the believer, Jesus's teaching is tangibly satisfying, akin to the pleasure one feels when eating and drinking to the fullest extent.

Despite Jesus's teaching, many in the crowd who enjoy Jesus's miraculous provision entrench themselves in unbelief. They cannot understand Jesus's statements that he is from God, coming as the bread from heaven (John 6:41–44). In John 6:45, Jesus states that those in the roles of hearing and learning from the Father come to him ("Everyone who has heard and learned [πᾶς ὁ ἀκούσας ... καὶ μαθών] from the Father comes to me"). The articular substantival participle of πιστεύω in John 6:47 ("**Whoever believes** [ὁ πιστεύων] has eternal life") culminates what we have seen already in John 6:35 and 40. Jesus repeatedly sets out the role of believing in him as the intended result of the feeding miracle detailed at the outset of the chapter. Since Jesus is the true bread from heaven, believing in him is akin to eating and drinking with unending spiritual satisfaction. The role of believing is collocated with eternal blessing throughout John 6. Many of Jesus's disciples find this teaching difficult to grasp and turn away (6:60, 66). None of this surprises Jesus because he knows from the beginning not only those who would take up the role of unbelief but even the one who would hand him over to the Roman officials to be crucified (6:64).[12]

4. Believing, Resurrection, and Eternal Life

John 11:25	εἶπεν αὐτῇ ὁ Ἰησοῦς· ἐγώ εἰμι ἡ ἀνάστασις καὶ ἡ ζωή· ὁ πιστεύων εἰς ἐμὲ κἂν ἀποθάνῃ ζήσεται,	Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. **Whoever believes** in me, though he die, yet shall he live.
John 11:26	καὶ πᾶς ὁ ζῶν καὶ πιστεύων εἰς ἐμὲ οὐ μὴ ἀποθάνῃ εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα. πιστεύεις τοῦτο;	And everyone who lives and **believes** in me shall never die. Do you believe this?

In John's Gospel, both Jesus and John collocate belief in Jesus with the concept of eternal life. By the time readers arrive at John 11 and the report of the death of Lazarus, they anticipate how Jesus might use Lazarus's passing to urge the crowds to believe in him and live forever.

Jesus urges them so in his conversation with Martha in John 11:21–27. As Jesus approaches Bethany, the home of Lazarus and his sisters Martha and Mary, Martha runs to Jesus. In the ensuing dialogue, Martha exhibits, to a degree at least, what might be considered doctrinal clarity about three issues. First, she confesses that if Jesus had arrived earlier, he could have prevented Lazarus from dying (11:21). Second, Martha confesses confidence in Jesus's relationship with God such that if Jesus would ask for Lazarus to be raised, God would do it (11:22). Third, Martha confesses belief that Lazarus will rise again in the last day (11:24). Martha's statements to Jesus demonstrate a grid of faith. The grid of

[12] "For Jesus knew from the beginning who those were who did not believe [οἱ μὴ πιστεύοντες], and who it was who would betray [ὁ παραδώσων] him" (John 6:64).

orthodox Christianity coheres around faith in Jesus, who himself is the resurrection and the life (11:25a). Resurrection to eternal life is an experience reserved only for those who take up the role of belief in Jesus.[13] In John 11:25b–26, Jesus says to Martha, "**Whoever believes** [ὁ πιστεύων] in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?"[14]

Martha's reply in verse 27, "Yes, Lord," places her as a model actress for all who would take up the role of believing in Jesus. She goes on to confess a settled belief that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God who has come into the world ("I believe [ἐγὼ πεπίστευκα] that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who is coming into the world"). Martha's choice of the perfect indicative of πιστεύω objectifies the level to which she has embraced the role of ὁ πιστεύων.[15] All who walk in the role of faith in Jesus understand that divine life has broken into the space-time universe. Jesus demonstrates in his first advent divine abilities (like resurrecting the dead), which many thought reserved until the day of eschatological judgment.

5. Conclusion

John writes πιστεύω as an articular substantival participle more than any other verb. The role of the believer is collocated with eternal life in nine of the nineteen times it is described in the Gospel of John (3:15, 16, 36; 5:24; 6:35, 40, 47; 11:25, 26). I have arranged these under four thematic headings that describe how they contribute to their immediate contexts and the broader narrative John writes. To participate in the Jesus drama, one must take up the role of the believer. Faith is the foundation upon which one must choose to live if they are going to get on stage. One thus enters the cast and walks on stage by believing, thus embracing the most fundamental role in the drama of history and eternity.

New birth and faith in Jesus cast a long shadow in John's mind. It is not surprising that Jesus sets out the role of the believer in his dialogue with Nicodemus in John 3. Nicodemus's journey from one

[13] Edward W. Klink III writes, "The 'life' Jesus offers the reader is eternal life, an eschatological life in which the reader is invited to participate in the cosmological realities to which the Gospel has been pointing. This life is both provided by Jesus and grounded in him" ("Discipleship in John's Gospel," in *Following Jesus Christ: The New Testament Message of Discipleship for Today*, ed. John K. Goodrich and Mark L. Strauss [Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic, 2019], 72).

[14] Jesus employs οὐ μή followed by the aorist subjunctive, an emphatic negation formula, in John's Gospel to vividly portray the spiritual blessings he provides those who believe in him (see Friedrich Wilhelm Blass, Albert Debrunner, and Robert W. Funk, *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986], §365; Wallace, *Beyond the Basics*, 468–69; Andreas J. Köstenberger, Benjamin L. Merkle, and Robert L. Plummer, *Going Deeper with New Testament Greek: An Intermediate Study of the Grammar and Syntax of the New Testament* [Nashville: B&H Academic, 2016], 207–8). Besides here in John 11:26, οὐ μή with the aorist subjunctive is collocated with the articular substantival participle in John 6:35 where Jesus states that the one in the role of coming to him will never hunger; Jesus promises that "whoever comes to me shall not hunger [ου μη πεινασηι]" and, "whoever comes to me I will never cast out [ου μη εκβαλω εξω]" (6:37). In John 8:12, Jesus states that the one embracing the role of following him will never walk in darkness ("Whoever follows me will not walk [οὐ μὴ περιπατήσῃ] in darkness"). The emphatic negation also connotes spiritual blessings without the articular substantival participle. In John 8:51, Jesus states that if someone keeps his word, he will never see death (οὐ μὴ θεωρήσῃ). Jesus repeats the same idea ("he will never taste [οὐ μὴ γεύσηται] death") in the next verse. In John 10:28, Jesus promises to give his sheep eternal life and that they will never perish (οὐ μὴ ἀπόλωνται εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα).

[15] Leon Morris comments, "Martha's use of this tense is all the more remarkable in that the present would have been the natural tense to use in reply to Jesus' question" (*The Gospel According to John*, NICNT [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995], 489 n. 59).

who inquires of Jesus at night to one who publicly identifies with Jesus in his burial (19:38–42) is an exemplar for all of John's readers. Jesus invites Nicodemus to enter the drama via new birth and belief. Jesus invites his hearers to a cognitive role of faith, hearing and believing his words (5:24). The feeding miracle is Jesus's platform for instruction about God's revelation in his eternal Son. Thus, in John 6:35, 40, and 47, Jesus emphasizes that those believing his word will have eternal life. In Johannine literature, spiritual satisfaction and confident witness are the lot of the believer.

Jesus's promise has special significance for Martha as she grieves the loss of her brother in John 11. Jesus is direct in his comfort to Martha: those embracing the role of the believer will die physically but be raised to resurrection life (11:25, 26). The collocation of articular substantival participles of πιστεύω with eternal life in the Gospel of John helps us to understand the future orientation of eternal life promised to all who believe in Jesus. Jesus's interaction with Martha culminates the nine uses of the articular substantial participle of πιστεύω. The physical resurrection of Lazarus emphasizes the quality of eternal life that comes after physical death. Why?

Jesus's resurrection of Lazarus makes him even more of a problem to the Pharisees and escalates their hostilities against him and those taking up the role of the believer. When the Pharisees hear of all that had taken place in Bethany (John 11:45–56), just before the Passover with thousands of Jews vulnerable to Jesus's growing influence just south of Jerusalem, they gather the Sanhedrin (11:47–53). From this point on, there is no turning back; Jesus must die. The fact that, shortly after Jesus raises Lazarus, crowds in Jerusalem throng to Jesus as he enters the city heightens the Pharisees' need to do away with him (12:17–19).

Jesus's promise of eternal life after physical death, portrayed in the physical resurrection of Lazarus, anticipates this point of sharp opposition Jesus and his followers must face. Even before the Pharisees gather the Sanhedrin in order to address the growing threat Jesus poses them, they try to arrest him at the Feast of Booths (John 7:32). They also threaten that any who confess Jesus would be banned from the synagogue (9:22). What might compel someone to publicly believe in Jesus even if they would suffer persecution like being removed from the social support of the synagogue community? What would cause them to seek recognition from God by publicly demonstrating faith in Jesus, even if that meant rejection by those around them (12:42–43)?

I offer in this essay that Jesus's promise of eternal life after physical death for those embracing the role of the believer emboldens them to identify with Jesus publicly. In the Farewell Discourse, Jesus repeatedly tells the disciples that they will suffer for taking up the role of the believer. As the world hates him, it will hate his followers (John 15:18–16:4). Jesus states in his prayer in John 17 that the disciples have believed in him despite being hated by the world for their faith (17:9–14). And Jesus is sending them into the world just as the Father sent him (17:15–19). Jesus thus asks that the Father keep them from the evil one as they endure opposition from the very ones who oppose Jesus himself. The confidence that eternal life provides believers has the present effect of emboldening them to testify despite threats here and now. Jesus's initial statements to Nicodemus regarding the role of the believer provide a framework for understanding Christian courage that results from the assurance of eternal life. Nicodemus coming to Jesus's cross in the day (19:38–42) shows his hope beyond the false security he thinks he has when he initially approaches Jesus at night.

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Not I, But Christ: An Exploration of Galatians 2:17–20

— Michael S. Yu —

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Abstract: In Galatians 2:15–21 the apostle Paul addresses the core issue of the epistle and sets forth his central thesis concerning the "truth of the gospel." While justification by faith figures prominently in the passage, to some interpreters Paul appears to shift his emphasis in verses 17–20 towards other theological matters. This article offers a reading of Galatians 2:17–20 that keeps forensic concerns at the forefront of Paul's thinking and suggests that justification is his consistent focus throughout Galatians 2:15–21. Such an interpretation also coheres with the priority of the forensic principle in the apostle's soteriology.

Commentators generally recognize the central place that Galatians 2:15–21 occupies in Paul's overall argument in the epistle, and yet there is significantly less consensus regarding the interpretation of this passage. Galatians 2:17–20 are particularly challenging verses. What does Paul mean by rebuilding "what I tore down" (Gal 2:18 ESV)? In what sense did Paul die to the law "through the law" (2:19)? And how do these points relate to what Paul says on justification and the grace of God (2:16, 21)? Some interpretations detect a shift in these verses whereby the apostle pivots from justification to redemptive-historical issues or the broader soteriological theme of union with Christ. These readings typically infer that Paul is speaking about the experiential and renovative aspects of salvation in verses 19–20. While Paul does expand his theological perspective, this essay suggests that forensic issues of legal satisfaction, righteousness, and judgment remain the apostle's primary concern throughout these verses and thus in Galatians 2:15–21 overall.

The aim of this essay is twofold: first, to propose that a justification-centric reading of verses 17–20 is not only warranted but supports a more cohesive interpretation of Paul's argument in Galatians 2:15–21; and second, to demonstrate the priority of the forensic principle in Paul's soteriological outlook and consider how that emphasis should inform our theology. Part 1 considers the literary context of Galatians 2:17–20, starting with an analysis of the overarching theological concern in the epistle. After sketching the basic structure and contours of Paul's argument in Galatians 2:15–21, part 2 offers a detailed examination of verses 17–20. Lastly, part 3 relates the proposed reading of these verses to other Pauline writings and considers a few specific theological topics.

1. Context of Galatians 2:15–21

This section provides an overview of Paul's doctrine of justification and the structure of the apostle's argument in the Galatians 2:15–21, which lays the groundwork for the in-depth discussion of verses 17–20 in part 2.

1.1. Central Issue in Galatians

Although Galatians predates the Jerusalem council recounted in Acts 15, the doctrinal and ecclesial issues are similar.[1] The nature of the problem that Paul is confronting shapes the deeply polemical tone of the epistle. Paul is apparently responding to charges that he changed his gospel message (Gal 2:1–5) and to accusations that he was trying to "please men" by being more accommodating to Gentiles (1:10).[2] The core issue of Galatians, however, is the fundamental doctrinal/theological question of how human beings can be "in the right" before God—i.e., justification. That issue underlies the attendant questions regarding the basis for inclusion of Gentiles into the church, the function of the law, and so forth.

Paul in Galatians depicts justification as the rendering of a legal verdict that pronounces a person to be in right standing with God based upon the work of Christ.[3] It is a forensic—that is, legal and judicial—declaration of righteousness by God, connoting the imagery and metaphor of a lawcourt. Douglas Moo convincingly argues that when Paul instructs on justification in the epistle he has Isaiah 46–55 in view (although, apart from Gal 4:27, he does not quote from it) and thus God's activity of "establishing right" and "vindication," or the status of "having been vindicated."[4] The verb δικαιόω hence appears in the passive voice—e.g., δικαιοῦται, δικαιωθῶμεν, δικαιωθήσεται (Gal 2:16)—with the human person as the subject and recipient of God's act. To be justified is to be accepted as righteous or just in the sight of God in his eschatological judgment; or as Paul states in Galatians 3:11, to be "justified before God." Paul's principal argument is that this comes by faith—that is, faith in Christ is the means by which a person is vindicated or judged as righteous.

The apostle's doctrine of justification is in stark contrast with the position of his opponents. Paul makes several references throughout Galatians that provide insight into these "agitators."[5] They are "false brothers" from outside the community who have been troubling the Galatians with their ideas, distracting the churches from the truth that the apostle had taught (Gal 1:7; 2:4; 5:7, 12). The agitators have a high view of the continuity of Christianity with the Mosaic covenant, insisting on submission to the law of Moses, particularly circumcision, in addition to embracing Jesus as the Messiah.[6] Thomas

[1] Scholars dispute the relationship between Galatians and the council. For an overview of the different positions and arguments in favor of an "early" date, see Douglas J. Moo, *Galatians*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013), 8–18; F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 41–56.

[2] Moo, *Galatians*, 52–53.

[3] Douglas J. Moo, "Justification in Galatians" in *Understanding the Times: New Testament Studies in the 21st Century: Essays in Honor of D.A. Carson on the Occasion of His 65th Birthday*, ed. Andreas J. Köstenberger and Robert W. Yarbrough (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011), 165. See also, Thomas R. Schreiner, *Galatians*, ZECNT 9 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 155–57; Bruce, *Epistle to the Galatians*, 138.

[4] Moo, *Galatians*, 52–53.

[5] This essay will adopt "agitators" as the term for Paul's opponents, following several of the commentators cited herein.

[6] Ronald Y. K. Fung, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 7–9; Bruce, *Epistle to the Galatians*, 112–13.

Schreiner notes that circumcision "was the badge and symbol that one must obey the whole law (torah)."[7] For the agitators, then, submission and observance of the law is necessary in order for a person to be justified (4:21; 5:4). They therefore insist that Gentile believers must be circumcised and brought under the law (5:2–4; 6:12); they must "Judaize" (become Jews) in order to have right standing with God and be included among his people.

1.2. Immediate Context of Galatians 2:17–20

The specific situation that prompts Paul's response in Galatians 2:15–21, however, does not involve the agitators directly but the conduct of Peter, Barnabas, and other Jewish Christians in Antioch. Specifically, Paul observed that they were not acting in accord with the "truth of the gospel" (2:14). First, they were being hypocrites. They themselves felt free to fellowship with the Gentiles and live like them until certain men from James arrived (2:12). Thereafter, they acted as though such fellowship was problematic, even prohibited. Second, and more importantly, by their behavior they indicated (and supported the agitators' position) that Gentiles must submit and conform to the law in order to be Christians.

Galatians 2:15–21 then serves as the transition point in the epistle. Moo observes that Paul moves from autobiographical matters and the confrontation in Antioch to address the "central theological issue that lies behind that incident and the situation in Galatia as well."[8] The issue is broader than table fellowship or even a proper understanding of salvation history; the question Paul is addressing is fundamentally anthropological and soteriological.[9] Galatians 2:15–21 is the key passage wherein Paul sets forth his thesis regarding the "truth of the gospel." It serves as the doctrinal base (or "hermeneutical key"[10]) upon which he will expound and from which he will draw implications in the remainder of the letter. And in his thesis, as I will argue below, Paul primarily and *consistently* emphasizes the forensic aspect of God's gracious salvation of sinners in and through Jesus Christ.

As for the structure of Paul's argument in Galatians 2:15–21, he starts with two premises concerning justification and the law and then proceeds to demonstrate that they cannot both be true. The first premise is expressed in verse 15: Gentile Christians are "sinners" unless they submit to the law, especially circumcision, and "live like Jews" (2:14).[11] This is the explicit teaching of the agitators, and it was reflected in the behavior of Peter and the Jewish Christians at Antioch, even though they believed otherwise (hence Paul's charge of hypocrisy). Paul adopts this position for the sake of argument—as J. B. Lightfoot observes, "sinners" is used here with some irony.[12] An implied part of this first premise—an inference of the Jew/Gentile distinction—is that the Gentile Christians' faith in Christ is insufficient for acceptance and inclusion among God's people.

The second premise, in verse 16, sets forth Paul's summary statement regarding justification: a person is justified by faith in Jesus Christ (ἐκ πίστεως Χριστοῦ), not by works of the law (καὶ οὐκ ἐξ ἔργων

[7] Schreiner, *Galatians*, 50.

[8] Moo, *Galatians*, 22.

[9] Moo, *Galatians*, 59–60; Fung, *Epistle to the Galatians*, 114–18.

[10] Schreiner, *Galatians*, 151.

[11] See the discussion of verse 17 below regarding other views of Gal 2:15.

[12] J. B. Lightfoot, *Epistle to the Galatians*, 2nd ed. (Andover, MA: Draper, 1870), 242. Cf. Moo, *Galatians*, 156. According to Moo, Paul uses this "traditional" Jewish designation "only to debunk it."

νόμου).[13] At the end of the verse the apostle adds for emphasis that no one—Jew or Gentile (πᾶσα σάρξ being an OT reference to all humanity)[14]—will be justified by works (οὐ δικαιωθήσεται). This clarification apparently comes in response to the view that a person is justified by faith in Christ in conjunction with works of the law. Moo observes that "in place of the agitators' synthesis of faith in Christ *and* the law, Paul insists on an antithesis: it is Christ and therefore *not* the law."[15] In short, verse 16 sets up faith/Christ and works/law as mutually exclusive for justification—those who seek to be justified in Christ (ἐν Χριστῷ, 2:17) cannot be those who seek the same by the law (ἐν νόμῳ, 5:4).

Having set up the two competing premises in verses 15 and 16, the Christ-versus-law antithesis occupies Paul's argument in verses 17–20. Briefly, Paul demonstrates the incompatibility of faith and works for justification and then explains the justified person's relationship to the law because of Christ. Verses 17–20 then lead into Paul's provocative conclusion in verse 21 in which he draws a diametric contrast between God's grace and human effort.[16] Justification by faith in Christ is an act of God's grace because righteousness comes by trusting in Christ's atoning work, not by personal achievement in keeping the law.[17] Conversely, to seek justifying righteousness by the law is to "nullify the grace of God" and to assert that Christ's death was for "no purpose" (2:21). If the law was sufficient for righteousness, then his death was superfluous.[18] Paul's climactic summation in verse 21 therefore denotes that forensic justification, God's gracious declaration of the believer's righteousness based upon Christ's death and resurrection, is central to the truth of the gospel.

2. Examination of Galatians 2:17–20

Having surveyed the context and general structure of Paul's argument in Galatians 2:15–20, this part of the essay carefully examines verses 17–20. My thesis is that Paul maintains a consistent focus on forensic righteousness/justification even while he broadens his discourse to issues of redemptive history, union with Christ, and the transformative aspect of salvation.

2.1. Verse 17

As indicated by the particle δέ, Paul presents a problem to Peter and the other Jewish Christians. In context, δέ marks an objection or potential contrast to what Paul has just said. The phrase ζητοῦντες δικαιωθῆναι ἐν Χριστῷ is a restatement of καὶ ἡμεῖς εἰς Χριστὸν Ἰησοῦν ἐπιστεύσαμεν ἵνα δικαιωθῶμεν in verse 16—that is, the Jewish Christians' endeavor to be justified in Christ is their believing in Christ so that they might be justified. The present active adverbial participle (ζητοῦντες), followed by a passive complementary infinitive (δικαιωθῆναι), has a causal relationship to their status and raises a serious predicament. By or as a result of ζητοῦντες δικαιωθῆναι ἐν Χριστῷ, the Jewish Christians are ironically

[13] The phrase ἐὰν μὴ should be translated as "but" indicating an antithetical either/or relationship. See Fung, *Epistle to the Galatians*, 115.

[14] Bruce, *Epistle to the Galatians*, 140.

[15] Moo, *Galatians*, 154.

[16] Moo, *Galatians*, 59–60; J. Gresham Machen, *Notes on Galatians*, ed. John H. Skilton, reprint ed. (Birmingham, AL: Solid Ground Christian Books, 2006), 156, 161.

[17] Further to Paul's statements in his other epistles, especially Romans, for a sinner to be justified, there must be forgiveness and atonement for sin, as well as the conferring or imputation of righteousness as a gift (see Rom 4:7–8; 5:16–18).

[18] Bruce, *Epistle to the Galatians*, 147.

themselves (αὐτοί) also found to be "sinners" (ἁμαρτωλοί) in God's judgment. This outcome is phrased as the protasis of a first-class conditional ("But if, in our endeavor…"), as indicated by the particle εἰ. Like Paul's assertion in Galatians 2:15, it is assumed to be true for the sake of argument; actually, Paul offers it as a hypothetical contrary to fact for the purpose of showing that verse 15 and verse 16 express two irreconcilable positions. On the one hand, these Jewish Christians believe (or act as if they believe) that Gentile Christians are "sinners" unless they submit to the law and become Jews (2:14–15). On the other hand, they presumably agree with Paul's statement in verse 16 that no one can be justified by works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ. Yet, having also believed in Christ Jesus, they are (somehow) in the same position as Gentile "sinners."

Why, despite the Jew/Gentile distinction, would relying on Christ result in the Jewish Christian also being found a "sinner"? Because seeking to be justified in Christ means to set aside the law for justification, the very law that imposes the separation between Jew and Gentile. Setting aside the law is a point Paul will expand upon in the following verses, but here in verse 17 it is an implied consequence of "our endeavor to be justified in Christ." The Gentile church members had been living under the belief that they are not under compulsion to become Jews in order to be Christians, because justification is by faith and not by keeping the law. And this is how Peter and the other Jewish Christians in Antioch were also living before the arrival of certain men from Jerusalem. But if the Jewish Christians are now insisting—whether by behavior (as Peter) or teaching (as the agitators)—that Gentiles must submit to the law, then by implication Christ is insufficient for justification. Those relying on Christ and not works (2:16) are still in sin and thus found to be "sinners." Paul, however, clearly rejects this hypothesis because the apodosis of the conditional in verse 17 is a rhetorical question that expects a negative answer, as indicated by the particle ἆρα.

Being found "sinners" not only entails that Christ would be inadequate for justification, but that he would be a "servant of sin." The NASB translates διάκονος as "minister," which is helpful because Paul's meaning here is that Christ would function as the agent that accomplishes something for sin.[19] Some commentators interpret this phrase as Paul addressing the charge that his doctrine of grace opens the door to sinful behavior as in Romans 6:1, especially since Paul provides the same exclamatory answer, μὴ γένοιτο.[20] While the behavior of the believer is certainly in view, the foreground issue that Paul is addressing is a forensic one. They would be "found" (εὑρέθημεν) to be sinners. The verb is passive aorist, connoting a legal/judicatory act performed *upon* the person seeking justification in Christ.

To summarize Paul's argument thus far, if adherence to the law is necessary for justification—that is, if the Jew/Gentile distinction based on law-keeping (Gal 2:15) is true and warranted—then the Jewish Christian who relies on Christ and not works finds condemnation instead. He is in the same position as the Gentile "sinner," and Christ is then a minister of sin/condemnation rather than of righteousness/justification. That is, of course, an absurd consequence. And denying the consequent means that the antecedent is false—in other words, Christ cannot be a minister of sin, and thus seeking to be justified in Christ cannot result in being "found to be sinners."[21] By implication, then, abandoning the law for justification (the corollary of seeking justification in Christ) is not sinful. It is rather the Jew/Gentile

[19] Cf. Rom 13:4 where the civil authority is the διάκονος of God, appointed to carry out his purposes.

[20] See, e.g., Bruce, *Epistle to the Galatians*, 141.

[21] Paul uses the same rhetorical structure in Gal 2:21: "for if righteousness were through the law, then Christ died for no purpose." Cf. Machen, *Notes on Galatians*, 149.

demarcation proposed in verse 15 that must be erroneous. Jews and Gentiles are both justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, reconfirming Paul's thesis in verse 16.

There are various opinions on how to interpret Paul's statement in Galatians 2:15, and this, in turn, affects one's interpretation of verse 17. One interpretation is that Paul is conceding that he and Peter are part of God's historical covenant people, whereas the Gentiles are by birth separated from God (cf. Eph 2:11–12). Hence, the Jewish Christians did have special privileges, but those availed for naught when they sought justification in Christ and realized that they were sinners along with the Gentiles.[22] Others say that Paul is using traditional Jewish language. The Gentiles are "sinners" because the torah excluded them from the people of God. But now that the law no longer serves that function, Jewish Christians who set aside the law by seeking Christ have the same status as Gentile believers. The latter part of verse 17 is hence the anticipated or actual objection of Paul's opponents: "If your teaching calls upon Jews to abandon the law and become like the Gentiles, then are you not making Christ a servant of sin? Does he not lead us to sin?"[23]

These interpretations each offer strengths and weaknesses, and I admit that my reading of verses 15 and 17 has its own difficulties. For example, it is not readily apparent from verse 15 itself that Paul is assuming the position of Peter and the agitators for the sake of argument. Moreover, my analysis presents the flow of Paul's argument as largely rhetorical and somewhat less straightforward. Nonetheless, I believe the alternative interpretations suffer from a few significant problems. First, it seems unlikely to me that Paul would affirm that Jews and Gentiles differ in terms of being sinners before faith in Christ (see, e.g., Rom 3:9). Second, Paul generally discounts the Jew/Gentile distinction when speaking of them as believers since they are all part of the same body (Gal 3:28; 1 Cor 12:13; Eph 3:6; Col 3:11); thus, it makes sense that he would use the distinction in this passage only for the purpose of rebutting it. Third, saying that those who endeavor to be justified can in a genuine sense be "found to be sinners" *as a consequence of* seeking justification in Christ seems like an odd proposition for Paul to affirm if this is the core doctrine he is seeking to explain and defend in the epistle. Paul's μὴ γένοιτο makes more sense if he is not only refuting the apodosis (that Christ can be a "servant of sin") but the protasis of the conditional as well.[24]

2.2. Verse 18

If verse 17 offers a negative apologetic (by way of a *reductio ad absurdum*) for justification by faith in Christ, then verse 18 is similarly a negative argument against justification by works/law. Paul employs another first-class conditional statement for this purpose, again beginning with εἰ. As indicated by the connective γάρ, verse 18 serves as an explanation of μὴ γένοιτο in verse 17 and progresses his overall argument in Galatians 2:15–21.

Given the stark contrast that he draws between justification by faith in Christ (ἐκ πίστεως Χριστοῦ) versus the works of the law (ἐξ ἔργων νόμου) in Galatians 2:16, that which was torn down (ἃ κατέλυσα) should be understood as the law as the means or way of justification. The law was "torn down" when they believed in Christ Jesus because justification is by faith and not works. Paul's implied premise is that the truth of one entails the falsity of the other, and vice versa. If it is false that seeking justification

[22] Schreiner, *Galatians*, 154, 168.

[23] See Bruce, *Epistle to the Galatians*, 141; Lightfoot, *Epistle to the Galatians*, 242–244.

[24] For a similar analysis of Gal 3:21 see Moises Silva, *Interpreting Galatians: Explorations in Exegetical Method*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001), 188.

in Christ through faith makes someone a sinner—because this would make Christ a "minister of sin" (μὴ γένοιτο)—then it is true that what does make him a sinner is seeking justification by the law through works.[25]

The clause παραβάτην ἐμαυτὸν συνιστάνω serves as the contrast to being found to be a sinner because of Christ in verse 17. The conditional statement is one of equivalence, that is, rebuilding what one had previously demolished (protasis) is to prove oneself a transgressor (apodosis).[26] While παραβάτης is synonymous with ἁμαρτωλός in verse 17, there is the added nuance of being a lawbreaker. The point is that reestablishing (or rebuilding, to use Paul's metaphor) the law for justification only serves to demonstrate that the law should not have been set aside in the first place. The present rebuilding demonstrates that the destruction was wrong. By now insisting on submission to the law for Jews and Gentiles alike, Peter simply proves that he was transgressing the law while living like a Gentile and not as a Jew (Gal 2:14). And the same argument can be extended to the agitators who profess Christ and yet insist on the necessity of keeping the law to attain righteous standing before God. F. F. Bruce comments, "If the law was still in force, as the Galatians were being urged to believe, then those who sought salvation elsewhere were transgressors by its standard."[27]

Schreiner interprets verse 18 as making a point about salvation history. Rebuilding the OT law is to go back to the "old era" while the "new era" has already been inaugurated by Christ. It is to go backward in salvation history to the age "dominated by sin and the law" rather than live in the age "marked by righteousness and life."[28] The new eschatological age ushered in by Christ and the obsoleteness of the torah is certainly in view, and Paul will address the function of the law as a guardian to anticipate Christ in Galatians 3:21–24. But it seems to me that his primary point here is anthropological and forensic. It is about how a person will be "found" in God's judgment. He is speaking more broadly and universally of the futility of human effort for justification, a message directly applicable to Gentile Christians, who were never under the "old era" of OT law.

This leads to another implicit point in verse 18, which is that rebuilding the law would prove the person to be a transgressor because righteousness cannot be established by the law (Gal 2:21). Paul has already asserted that personal law-keeping cannot lead to justification in verse 16, a position he develops here and later in the epistle. The person who relies on the law for justification will instead find himself under a curse because he cannot keep the whole law (3:10; 5:3–4). In summary, it is not seeking to be justified by faith in Christ that leads to condemnation as a transgressor but rather returning to the law for righteousness through human effort/works. Together, verses 17 and 18 constitute Paul's contention that faith/Christ and works/ law are mutually exclusive and his contrasting principles with respect to justification, a claim that verses 19–20 will reinforce and explain further.

[25] The converse of this conditional statement is what Paul expresses in Gal 2:16—if it is true that faith in Christ justifies, then it is false that one is justified by works of the law.

[26] Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 683.

[27] Bruce, *Epistle to the Galatians*, 142.

[28] Schreiner, *Galatians*, 170.

2.3. Verses 19–20: "Death"

Moises Silva observes that verse 18 sets forth the paradoxical result that returning to the law leads to sin rather than righteousness.[29] And verse 19, which also begins with γάρ, offers an explanation that is itself paradoxical: Paul lives because the law brought about his death.

What is the theological or conceptual connection between Paul's death and the previous verse? The short answer is that death "to the law" indicates that the edifice of the law for justification has been "torn down." Let us note that Paul here does not deviate from verse 18's notion that the law is the means or agent (διὰ νόμου) that brings about condemnation; rather, he takes the concept and develops it in another direction. Being under the law makes a person a παραβάτην, and the legal consequence of being found a transgressor before God is the curse of death. Here Paul touches briefly on the law/sin/curse/death connection (and by implication, its opposite, the faith/righteousness/life connection) that he will explore in Galatians 3:10–22.[30] Yet, if that death has taken place—its occurrence signified by the aorist ἀπέθανον—then the law has served its judicial function. This is Paul's meaning when he asserts that he has died "to the law" (νόμῳ)—i.e., in reference to the law. Bruce rightly observes, "The question of transgressing the law does not arise for one who has died in relation to the law."[31] Because the judicial consequence demanded by the law has been realized, the law no longer has a determining role with respect to Paul's standing before God.

The nature of Paul's death to the law is explained by "I have been crucified with Christ." The perfect tense of συνεσταύρωμαι indicates a completed act with a present, ongoing (stative) effect. Galatians 3:13 explains that Christ became "a curse for us" such that he satisfied the judicial consequence of Paul's transgressions. Christ, not Paul, was crucified; yet there is a relationship of solidarity between them such that Paul's "objective position" is that he died to the law by participation in Christ's death.[32] And identification/solidarity with Christ is established by faith in him. Earlier in Galatians 2:16, Paul asserts that they have believed "in" (εἰς, or perhaps even "into") Christ Jesus, and they have done so for the purpose of (ἵνα) being justified. Justification is, moreover, "in Christ" (ἐν Χριστῷ, 2:17); that is, by union or incorporation into Christ.[33] Paul continues this line of thinking in verse 20 when he says that Christ lives ἐν ἐμοί and Paul now lives ἐν πίστει. These connected recurrences of "in" and "faith" indicate that faith is the means by which the close relationship between Christ and the believer is established.

The phrase παραδόντος ἑαυτὸν ὑπὲρ ἐμοῦ in verse 20 supplies the reason or motive for Paul's life by faith, but the phrase also highlights the legal aspect of the relationship between Christ and Paul. Jesus is the Son of God "who gave himself," which in this context means to hand over to an authority for punishment and suffering.[34] The usual meanings of ὑπέρ with the genitive include "for the benefit of" or "on behalf of." Given what Paul says in Galatians 3, what he evidently means here is that Christ gave himself for Paul's advantage as a substitute.[35] Christ suffered the condemnation and curse of the law in Paul's place, thereby redeeming him from the law (Gal 3:13). This suggests that for Paul there is a legal/

[29] Silva, *Interpreting Galatians*, 174.

[30] See especially Gal 3:10–14, 21–22.

[31] Bruce, *Epistle to the Galatians*, 143.

[32] Fung, *Epistle to the Galatians*, 123.

[33] Fung, *Epistle to the Galatians*, 119.

[34] BDAG s.v. "παραδίδωμι." See also Rom 4:25; 8:32.

[35] Murray J. Harris, *Prepositions and Theology in the Greek New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 209, 216.

forensic unity between him and Christ such that the effect of Christ's death—namely, the satisfaction of the penal demands of the law—has been applied to Paul. He has been legally joined to the death of his substitute/representative, and therefore Paul has died to the law as well.

To summarize, the logic of Paul's argument may be clearer if we work backwards from verse 21 to verse 19. Christ died according to the grace of God (2:21), giving himself as a substitute to suffer on Paul's behalf (2:20). Through faith in Christ, there is an identification/union between Paul and Christ (2:20) such that the condemnation and curse that comes "through the law" (2:19) was borne by Christ for Paul in the crucifixion. Forensically speaking, Christ's death is Paul's death, and as such, all the penal demands of the law owed by Paul have been met. Paul was crucified with Christ and has therefore died to the law and is no longer bound to it (2:19; cf. Rom 7:6).[36] In short, a believer by faith is united with Christ in Jesus's death and satisfaction of the law's demands, resulting in his justification and the tearing down (abandoning) of the law. Conversely, reestablishing the law for justification would mean that the rebuilder has not died to the law but is still under it and obligated to fulfill its requirements.

2.4. Verses 19–20: "Life"

Having examined Paul's death to the law, the next question is how that relates to Paul's life. Specifically, what does Paul mean that he died to the law "*so that* I might live to God"? It is worth noting, first, that ἵνα in verse 19 indicates both purpose and result. Paul died in order to be brought into new life, and verse 20 makes clear that Paul is currently alive in this respect.

Here also Schreiner understands Paul to be making a redemptive-historical claim. The purpose of dying to the law is so that believers no longer live under it but "live in the new age of salvation."[37] As noted above, this observation is correct but shifts Paul's focus away from justification and implies that justification was different under the "old age." Yet Paul will point to Abraham as the model for justifying righteousness by faith (Gal 3:6), a righteousness that was never meant to come from the law (3:21).

Other commentators propose that Paul is speaking about the ethical/transformative aspect of salvation. Citing Romans 6:10–11, Bruce comments that believers are no longer under the law because of their faith-union with Christ in his death and resurrection. The believer now lives with Christ in his resurrection life, which is in fact "nothing less than the risen Christ living his life in the believer."[38] Lightfoot similarly observes that Paul is speaking of his present existence as "merged into Christ."[39] Without discounting these interpretations, they seem to suggest that in verses 19–20 Paul stops talking about justification and pivots his focus to the subjective transformed life of the believer.

While I agree that in these verses (especially verse 20) Paul broadens his didactic scope to redemptive-history, union with Christ, and the consequent renovated life of believers in the new age, I would suggest that the priority for Paul, his primary emphasis, is still the forensic/legal aspect of salvation. First, "died to the law" is set in contrast to "live to God." So just as "crucified with Christ" elucidates Paul's death to the law, "It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me" explains his God-ward life. If Paul's solidarity with Christ in the former has a legal aspect, then it seems reasonable to conclude the same for the latter. Just as Paul died to the law vicariously or representationally through Christ's crucifixion, so also Paul is alive to God vicariously through Christ's life. The soteriological connection between life and

[36] Bruce, *Epistle to the Galatians*, 143.
[37] Schreiner, *Galatians*, 171.
[38] Bruce, *Epistle to the Galatians*, 144.
[39] Lightfoot, *Epistle to the Galatians*, 246.

righteousness within Paul's thinking is evident later in the epistle and elsewhere in Paul's writings (e.g., Gal 3:11, 21–22; Rom 5:17–18, 21). Christ's living in Paul should therefore be understood as Christ's righteousness on account of which Paul is accepted as righteous in God's sight. Calvin interprets "Christ who lives in me" in this way and says it refers to "justification by free grace."[40]

Second, while ἐν ἐμοί is frequently taken in a locative sense,[41] ἐν can signal other relationships between two parties. Paul says in Galatians 1:24 that the churches glorified God ἐν ἐμοί, that is, "because of" Paul. The phrase ἐν Χριστῷ (2:17) is contrasted with ἐν νόμῳ (5:4) as different means or agents for justification.[42] I would suggest that here in verse 20 ἐν ἐμοί includes the dative of reference or advantage.[43] D. A. Carson advocates this reading of ἐν ἐμοί, reasoning, "Paul wasn't literally crucified, he didn't literally hang, but Christ was crucified with reference to Paul, with respect to Paul.… Just as Christ's death was with reference to me, so also Christ's life is with reference to me."[44] In that case, then, Paul's meaning is that just as he died with respect to the law, Christ suffering Paul's condemnation, so now Christ lives to God with respect to (for the advantage of) Paul, the apostle partaking of Christ's righteousness and life for justification.

Developing the argument further, when Paul says he has been crucified with Christ, he almost certainly includes his participation in Christ's resurrection. The resurrection is not explicitly mentioned, although it is implied in the reference to Christ's living in Paul.[45] Given their centrality to Paul's gospel message, Christ's death and resurrection are frequently mentioned together in his discussion of salvation (e.g., Rom 4:25; 6:4; 8:34). With that in mind, we should generally assume that where Paul only references one act the other is included by implication. Calvin helpfully remarks, "So then, let us remember that whenever mention is made of his death alone, we are to understand at the same time what belongs to his resurrection. Also, the same synecdoche applies to the word 'resurrection.'"[46]

"I have been crucified with Christ" thus includes being raised with Christ, an assertion Paul explicitly makes elsewhere with respect to those who have faith in Christ (e.g., Rom 6:4; Eph 2:6; Col 2:12). And being raised with Christ has an unmistakable forensic significance because Christ's resurrection was his justification, the vindication of his righteousness and complete obedience to the law (Rom 4:25; 1 Tim 3:16).[47] Richard Gaffin says of believers that "Christ's justification, given with his resurrection, becomes theirs. When they are united to the resurrected and justified Christ by faith, his righteousness is reckoned as theirs, or imputed to them."[48] Gaffin does not cite Galatians 2:19–20, but his comments

[40] John Calvin, *Commentary on The Epistles of Paul to the Galatians and Ephesians*, trans. William Pringle, Calvin's Commentaries 21 (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 74. Calvin, however, expresses his willingness to adopt the view that sanctification ("regeneration") is also contemplated.

[41] For example, that new life under the power and control of Christ is manifest *in* Paul. See the comments above regarding Bruce's and Lightfoot's interpretations.

[42] BDAG, s.v. " ἐν."

[43] Harris, *Prepositions*, 120–21.

[44] D. A. Carson, "An Apostolic Disputation and Justification," The Gospel Coalition, 18 August 2023, https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/sermon/an-apostolic-disputation-and-justification/. Carson notes that this reading is not unique to him.

[45] Silva, *Interpreting Galatians*, 175. Silva says that although the language of resurrection is not used "the concept is implicit and inescapable."

[46] Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* 2.16.13.

[47] Geerhardus Vos, *The Pauline Eschatology*, reprint ed. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 1994), 151–52.

[48] Richard B. Gaffin Jr., *By Faith, Not by Sight: Paul and the Order of Salvation*, 2nd ed. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2013), 97.

are nevertheless applicable. As mentioned earlier, life and righteousness are bound up together in Paul's thinking. Indeed, to have life is synonymous with being accepted by God—that is, to be justified as righteous. And if justifying righteousness/life is not found in the law (Gal 2:21) or works (2:16), then by inference righteousness/life is found in Christ and appropriated by faith.

This "forensic reading" of verses 19–20 hence keeps justification squarely within Paul's purview throughout Galatians 2:17–20 and provides natural connections to Galatians 2:15–16 and Galatians 2:21. As Carson notes, "What this reading [of ἐν ἐμοί] does is show that the entire explanation that Paul gives has to do with justification."[49] Moreover, recognizing the priority of the forensic/legal meaning in these verses helps us better understand the remainder of verse 20. Christ's justifying righteousness comes at the inception of Paul's new subjective life of righteousness. He first says, "It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me," before he then describes the life he now lives "in the flesh." Having been crucified and raised with Christ, Paul is not found to be a sinner under condemnation, contrary to those who rebuild the law, but is found righteous before God and therefore enabled to live for him. Paul has made a radical breach with the law because Christ has delivered him from both the guilt (legal consequence) and power (ethical consequence) of sin that comes through the law. Nonetheless, because Galatians 2:15–21 starts with Paul's thesis on justification, we should understand that the believer's change in legal relation logically precedes and makes possible his change in behavior. Having been set free from the law by Christ, the believer has been transferred into the new age of the Spirit (5:22); he has entered into a new life with God as his focus even while living in this "present evil age" (1:4).[50] The new God-ward focused life is characterized by praise and gratitude to the Son of God, the one who "loved me and gave himself for me."[51] We thus see in verses 19–20 an order and progression whereby the forensic/legal aspect of salvation provides the basis for the ethical and transformative. Christ died and was raised for Paul, and therefore Paul now lives by and for the Son of God.

3. Theological Reflections

This section will extend the analysis offered in part 2 to a discussion of the priority of the forensic principle in Paul's epistles and in two key structures/themes in the apostle's theology, union with Christ and redemptive history. I will then briefly consider the implications of that priority for the relationship between justification and sanctification. Hereinafter, by "priority" I mean a conceptual order that assigns a place of primacy to the forensic relative to the transformative and renovative aspects of salvation in one's teaching and theology, which corresponds to the logical order (in my view) of justification and sanctification within the *ordo salutis*.

3.1. Priority of the Forensic in the Pauline Epistles

Recognizing Paul's consistent focus on justification in Galatians 2:17–20 does not, of course, require that we limit his teaching in the passage to forensic issues of legal satisfaction, righteousness, vindication, and so forth. Nor should we feel compelled to choose between forensic and transformative/experiential categories in our interpretation and analysis. Paul's soteriology is multifaceted and encompasses both as

[49] Carson, "An Apostolic Disputation and Justification."

[50] Moo, *Galatians*, 170.

[51] See the discussion of ὑπὲρ ἐμοῦ above.

well as various other motifs. We should nevertheless recognize the primary importance of the forensic in the structure of Paul's thinking. Geerhardus Vos says in this regard:

> Paul's mind was to such an extent forensically oriented that he regarded the entire complex of subjective spiritual changes that take place in the believer and of subjective spiritual blessings enjoyed by the believer as the direct outcome of the forensic work of Christ applied in justification. The mystical is based on the forensic, not the forensic on the mystical.[52]

This forensic-transformative order is reflected in the interpretation of Galatians 2:17–20 suggested above, and we also see it in the organizational structure of the epistle. Paul's definition and defense of "the truth of the gospel" starts with his thesis regarding justification by faith in Galatians 2:15–21. In Galatians 3, the apostle then expounds on the difference between faith and the law in terms of righteousness and God's gracious promise of salvation. Christ redeemed his people from the curse of the law by enduring that curse for them so that promised blessing of Abraham might come to those who believe (3:13). Righteousness and life do not come through the law (3:21); rather, the righteous live by faith and are justified by faith (3:11, 24). Justification and salvation history continue to be Paul's main focus in Galatians 4 through the first half of Galatians 5 before Paul turns his attention to ethical implications in Galatians 5:13–26.

Romans reflects a similar structure. At the outset of that epistle, Paul proclaims his allegiance to the gospel, "For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith" (Rom 1:17). Herman Ridderbos understands Paul to be speaking about a righteousness "which is valid in [God's] judgment" and which "God attributes to man"—in other words, the apostle is dealing with a "forensic category."[53] The forensic continues to be prominent in the early part of the epistle wherein Paul asserts that God is both just and the justifier of those who have faith (3:26), argues for the justification of the "ungodly" by faith (4:5), and explains the sin/condemnation/death versus righteousness/justification/life contrast between Adam and Christ (5:12–21). Having laid this groundwork, Paul then proceeds to discuss how believers are to consider themselves dead to sin and alive to God, because they have died with Christ and were raised with him (6:4–11).

There are also certain passages where the forensic-transformative order is evident. In Philippians 3 Paul says he above all wants to be found in Christ, not having his own righteousness through the law, but "that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith" (Phil 3:9). This foundational need for justifying righteousness is followed by Paul's desire to share in Christ's power and sufferings, and his present experience of "straining forward to what lies ahead" (3:10, 13). Returning to Romans 5, Paul says that having been justified, we have peace with God through Christ (5:1) and have also obtained access "by faith into this grace in which we stand" (5:2). Forensic justification is the entry point into the believer's experience of suffering, endurance, and spiritual growth (5:3–5).

Lastly, there are instances within the typical indicative/imperative structure of Paul's letters where he evidently gives primacy to the forensic aspect of Christ's work for believers. First Timothy starts with imperatives regarding false teaching and supplications for all men. The key indicative, the ground for Paul's instructions for holy living, is: "For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and

[52] Geerhardus Vos, "The Alleged Legalism in Paul's Doctrine of Justification," *The Princeton Theological Review* 1.2 (1903): 162. https://commons.ptsem.edu/id/princetontheolog1219arms-dmd002.

[53] Herman Ridderbos, *Paul: An Outline of His Theology*, trans. John Richard De Witt (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 163.

men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself as a ransom for all" (1 Tim 2:5–6). Similarly, Ephesians 1–4 is the extended indicative section that underlies the imperatives in Ephesians 5–6. At the beginning of the letter, Paul says we have been blessed with "every spiritual blessing" in Christ and chosen in him to be "holy and blameless" (Eph 1:3–4). And the first blessing that Paul then highlights is forensic in nature: "In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace" (Eph 1:7).

3.2. Union with Christ

Some may argue that ascribing priority to either the forensic or the transformative aspects of Paul's soteriology is misguided because union with Christ is a more fundamental category that undergirds them both. Moo comments that union is "a key (perhaps *the* key) idea" in Galatians. By it we can keep the forensic nature of justification from being confused with the transformative element while holding that the two are "inseparable but distinct effects of our union with Christ."[54] Gaffin goes somewhat further, calling union by faith the "essence of Paul's *ordo salutis*." While not losing sight of the centrality of justification and imputation to Paul's gospel, Gaffin argues that union is "a reality that is deeper, more fundamental, more decisive, more crucial" from which flows the simultaneous benefits of justification and sanctification.[55] Although Constantine Campbell disagrees that union is the "center" of Paul's theology, he proposes that it is a "metatheme" and "web" that holds together diverse Pauline ideas and concerns. Justification ought, in this regard, to be understood as the believer's participation in Christ's vindication and righteousness, which is received through union.[56]

Gaffin and Campbell are surely correct that justification cannot be abstracted from the basis of justification, which is Christ himself. As noted above, Paul says our justification is ἐν Χριστῷ. Still, if we affirm the Westminster Larger Catechism's statement that justification, adoption, and sanctification "manifest" our union with Christ, and those benefits are distinct from one another, then union itself is multifaceted.[57] Reformed theologians have thus distinguished between union's decretal, federal/legal, historical, and vital/existential aspects.[58] I would argue that, in Paul's thinking, the legal (i.e., forensic) aspect of union precedes the existential dimension. We see this priority in the Adam-Christ parallel in Romans 5:12–21. Those in Adam share in his trespass and guilt by virtue of a federal/legal union, just as those in legal union with Christ share in his obedience and righteousness. The transgression of Adam brought judgment on many, leading to condemnation and death. On the other hand, the obedience of Christ leads to justification and life for many.[59] It is after Paul explains the forensic relationship and its consequences that he then discusses the transformative implications of being united to Christ in his

[54] Moo, *Galatians*, 155.

[55] Gaffin, *By Faith, Not by Sight*, 49.

[56] Constantine R. Campbell, *Paul and Union with Christ: An Exegetical and Theological Study* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 404–5, 412–14, 441–42.

[57] Westminster Larger Catechism Q69.

[58] See, e.g., Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1940), 2:520–21, 2:551, 3:104, 3:127; Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 448–50; Joel R. Beeke and Mark Jones, *A Puritan Theology: Doctrine for Life* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage, 2012), 481–89. Gaffin himself recognizes within the concept of union a "threefold categorical distinction" in terms of God's decree, past redemptive-history, and the present experience. See Gaffin, *By Faith, Not by Sight*, 42–43. Cf. Campbell, *Paul and Union with Christ*, 406–14. Campbell gives a shorthand definition of union as "union, participation, identification, incorporation" (p. 414) that, conceptually, includes mystical, mediatorial, eschatological, and other dimensions.

[59] For an analysis of the forensic significance of this passage, see Ridderbos, *Paul*, 95–99.

death and resurrection in Romans 6. The interpretation of Galatians 2:17–20 offered above similarly gives primary attention to the legal unity between Christ and the believer.

We should moreover recognize that vital union finds its basis in decretal and federal union. John Owen asserts in this connection that the "first spring or cause of this [vital] union, and of all the other causes, lies in that eternal compact that was between the Father and the Son." Owen says that in the covenant of redemption Christ undertook to be the "surety" for his people, meaning one who is "just and legally to answer what is due to them, or from them."[60] Based on Owen's observations, we may rightly say that our vital/present union with Christ itself derives from the legal unity established in the *pactum salutis*. This suggests that even within our conception of union with Christ, precedence should be given to its legal dimension.

3.3. Paul's Redemptive-Historical Perspective

Salvation history is another key component of Paul's theology that surfaces in Galatians 2:17–20 and figures more prominently later in the epistle. Death to the law and new life by faith-union with Christ signals a decisive in-breaking of the eschatological age. This is evident in the implied reference to Christ's resurrection in Galatians 2:20, as well as the gift of the Holy Spirit in Galatians 3:2.[61] As noted in part 2, several commentators see a topical shift in verses 19–20 from justification to the transformative new existence of the believer, the new state that coincides with the transition from the age characterized by the law to the age characterized by faith. Paul's further exposition of salvation history in Galatians 3, however, does not revolve around the renovative and subjective, experiential aspects of the new age. Rather, he continues to address forensic issues. Among other points, he asserts that the curse of the law was borne by Christ (3:13); explains the purpose of the law, which was to reveal transgressions and anticipate Christ's coming (3:19, 23); and proves from the OT that the blessing of Abraham is promised to all who believe, that they also might be justified by faith (3:24). Justification is also surely in view in another critical redemptive-historical text, Galatians 4:4–5, which says that God sent forth his Son "in the fullness of time … born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law."

Gaffin rightly comments that justification "is not vaguely theological" but intelligible only in terms of the Abrahamic covenant and fulfillment by the Seed—in other words, within a redemptive-historical framework.[62] Yet we should not allow salvation history to obscure Paul's main theological concern in Galatians, which is about human inability to attain right standing before God apart from the gracious work of Christ. To go backwards in redemptive history is to return to slavery under the "weak and worthless elementary principles of the world" and identify with the "present Jerusalem" rather than the "Jerusalem above" (Gal 4:9, 25). And this is to be severed from Christ, fallen away from grace, and obligated to keep the law in its entirety for justification (5:4–5). On the other hand, to be justified by faith in Christ is to have the eschatological vindication of the righteous brought forward into the present, so that we "eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness" (5:5).[63] Within the epistle, Paul's arguments from salvation history function to explain and buttress, rather than supersede, his foreground issue of justification and the thesis he puts forward thereon in Galatians 2:15–21.

[60] John Owen, *The Doctrine of Justification by Faith*, reprint ed. (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage, 2006), 202, 205.

[61] Vos, *The Pauline Eschatology*, 45–47, 57–59; see also, Silva, *Interpreting Galatians*, 175.

[62] Richard B. Gaffin Jr., *In the Fullness of Time: An Introduction to the Biblical Theology of Acts and Paul* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2022), 275.

[63] See, e.g., Vos, *Pauline Eschatology*, 57–58; Ridderbos, *Paul*, 162–64; Gaffin, *By Faith, Not by Sight*, 92.

There is, moreover, within the structure of the *historia salutis* a forensic-transformative order. Commenting on Galatians 3:13–14, J. V. Fesko says, "One should note how the outpouring of the Spirit hinges (see Paul's use of the *hina* clause) upon the legal-forensic work of Christ."[64] Deeply embedded within the events of salvation history is the forensic nature of Christ's person and work—namely, his undertaking, as Owen says, to act as our surety and legal representative—which is the presupposition of the transformative work of the Spirit. Moreover, because justification discounts any human merit and looks solely to the grace of God and the work of Christ, prioritizing the forensic within the *historia salutis* underscores Paul's foundational redemptive-historical principle that salvation is monergistic; it is divine work from beginning to end. So even as we recognize the importance of the transformative in Paul's redemptive-historical outlook, we should not miss his fundamental perspective that God's work *for* us precedes and forms the basis for his work *in* us.

3.4. Justification and Sanctification

Vos notes that the resurrection is, next to the cross, "the outstanding event of redemptive history," and that in the resurrection two strands of Paul's theology expose themselves—the forensic (justification) and the transformative (regeneration and sanctification).[65] As discussed above, union with Christ precludes the separation of justification and sanctification while preserving their distinction. Not all would agree, however, that within union one of these benefits holds priority over the other. Gaffin, for example, asserts that in Paul's mind union should be given priority, citing Calvin's concept of the *duplex gratia* from *Institutes* 3.11.1 in which being united to Christ simultaneously results in the imputation of his righteousness and renovative/transformative grace.[66] For Vos, however, the "forensic principle is supreme and keeps in subordination to itself the transforming principle." In this regard, the resurrection shows the forensic principle to be the "deeper principle"; for from the justification of Christ at the resurrection springs the "supreme fruit" of the Spirit who in turn "bears in Himself the efficacious principle of all transformation to come."[67]

While the temporal precedence of justification vis-à-vis progressive sanctification seems generally accepted,[68] the logical priority of justification to definitive sanctification is a more disputed claim. Specifically, the following objections might be raised. First, justification and sanctification are both by faith, which unites us to Christ and his benefits. How, then, can either be "prior" in any sense? Moreover, if regeneration, which is renovative, is prior to faith, how can the forensic principle have priority over the transformative principle without endangering the Reformed doctrine of *sola fide* (justification by faith alone)?

[64] J. V. Fesko, *Justification: Understanding the Classic Reformed Doctrine* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2008), 90.

[65] Vos, *Pauline Eschatology*, 147–48.

[66] Richard B. Gaffin Jr., "Justification and Union with Christ," in *A Theological Guide to Calvin's Institutes*, ed. David W. Hall and Peter A. Lillback (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2008), 268–69; see also *By Faith, Not by Sight*, 59. Cf. Gaffin, *In the Fullness of Time*, 395. Because sanctification is ongoing over time, Gaffin says "justification is the absolute necessary and settled precondition for sanctification (though not its source or cause, as some argue)." Based on this quote, it appears that Gaffin recognizes the priority of justification vis-à-vis progressive sanctification.

[67] Vos, *Pauline Eschatology*, 151.

[68] See John Murray, *Redemption, Accomplished and Applied* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1955), 144–50.

These are legitimate contentions. Yet I think the distinction between objective and subjective justification offers a solid response.[69] According to Herman Witsius (1636–1708), this distinction was "well known" during his time. The former refers to God's declaration of "having received satisfaction from Christ, and pronounces, that all the elect are made free from guilt and obligation to punishment, even before their faith" while the latter is the "acknowledgment … intimated to the conscience by the Holy Spirit" and follows faith.[70] Louis Berkhof likewise says objective justification refers to God's declaration that a sinner is righteous based on the imputed righteousness of Christ, whereas subjective justification is the reception and application of that benefit by faith. Thus, "active [objective] justification logically precedes faith and passive [subjective] justification. We *believe* the forgiveness of sins."[71] Similarly, Herman Bavinck holds that objective justification is the forensic declaration of God pronounced in the resurrection of Christ, and this justification is subjectively accepted in faith. The former is the legal verdict, which occurs in the proclamation of the gospel and the effectual internal call of God therein, and logically precedes the latter, which is its "acceptance and possession."[72] Properly understood, then, justification in the purely objective, forensic sense is prior even to faith, and therefore to subjective justification and definitive sanctification. This seems consistent with Westminster Confession of Faith 11.1, which says that God justifies the elect, "by imputing the obedience and satisfaction of Christ unto them, they receiving and resting on him and his righteousness by faith." In other words, the elect are subjectively justified when faith receives (and faith is itself a gift based upon) the preceding objective work of Christ and his imputed righteousness. We also see this same order in Galatians 2:17–20, for Christ was crucified and raised to life for the believer, and this is the basis for the believer's identification with Christ in terms of death to the law and life to God by faith.

Moreover, to frame the relationship between justification and sanctification in the way that Vos does—that the forensic is the deeper, superior principle—is theologically helpful for several other reasons. First, maintaining the priority of the forensic reminds us that the sole cause and foundation of our salvation is the grace of God and the objective and external redemptive work of Christ for his people in history. We must always distinguish redemption accomplished from redemption applied so that no one may boast (Eph 2:9), not even in the fruit wrought in us by the Holy Spirit, lest human works overshadow and empty the cross of its meaning, as Galatians 2:21 warns us. Second, the eschatological dimension of justification safeguards assurance and refutes the notion that there is a "future justification" based on the believer's sanctification that is different from "present justification." Commenting on Romans 8:33–34, Vos says that Paul's claim regarding the believer's justification is "so absolute as to be indifferent to categories of present, past or future."[73] Third, being justified in Christ means participating

[69] This discussion is indebted to the research and analysis of Jae-Eun Park, "Driven by God: Active Justification and Definitive Sanctification in the Soteriology of Bavinck, Comrie, Witsius, and Kuyper" (PhD diss., Calvin Theological Seminary, 2016), 3, 90–94, 145–50, 215.

[70] Herman Witsius, *The Economy of the Covenants Between God and Man* 2.7.16.

[71] Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 517.

[72] Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003–2008), 4:219–220; *The Wonderful Works of God*, trans. Henry Zylstra, reprint ed. (Glenside, PA: Westminster Seminary Press, 2019), 440. See also, Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, ed. James T. Dennison, Jr., trans. George Musgrave Giger (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 1992–1997), 2:684–685. It must be noted that both Bavinck and Berkhof emphasize that objective and subjective justification cannot be separated—their distinction is logical rather than temporal, and the objective must find its realization when it is subjectively received by faith. See Park, "Driven by God," 90–94.

[73] Vos, *Pauline Eschatology*, 151.

in his justification-resurrection, which guarantees the believer's future bodily resurrection and inclusion in God's final transformative salvific act—namely, our glorification.[74] Knowing our ultimate identity and goal moreover furnishes the believer with the strongest motivation to pursue holiness in the fear of God.

4. Conclusion

The overall purpose of this essay has been to demonstrate the forensic orientation of Paul's thinking and its function as the "deeper principle" within the apostle's theology.[75] This began with an examination of Galatians 2:17–20, wherein I set forth an interpretation that maintains Paul's focus on justification throughout verses 15–21. Paul's thesis and argument certainly extends into matters of redemptive-history and the new experiential life of the believer. Within the passage, however, these concerns are subsidiary to Paul's primary emphasis on the legal dimension of Christ's death and life for the believer, which is central to the "truth of the gospel" (Gal 2:14).

Maintaining the integrity of the gospel is, in the final analysis, the reason for ascribing primacy and prominence to the forensic principle in Paul's soteriology and our own. Doing so upholds the grace of God, confesses total human inability, appreciates the exactness of God's justice, and proclaims the full sufficiency of Christ's atonement and righteousness. It directs us to first look outward to Jesus for the assurance of our salvation rather than inward to our own efforts, even to the fruit of the Spirit in our lives. For whatever is in us should never in our theology, our life, or our ministry overshadow the perfect work of the Son of God "who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification" (Rom 4:25). Let us therefore not boast in anything, whether our baptism, our works, or even our faith, but rather "in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world" (Gal 6:14).

[74] Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied*, 170.

[75] See the quotations of Vos above.

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A Taxonomy of Interpretations for Colossians 1:24

— Phil Thompson —

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Abstract: Interpreters need a systematic taxonomy for interpreting Colossians 1:24, a pivotal yet challenging passage in Colossians. One's interpretation of this verse holds vast implications for Pauline studies and New Testament studies. Existing interpretive frameworks provide limited help, but a conceptual matrix that modifies the approach of Jacob Kremer provides a better approach for mapping existing and future interpretations of the verse. This taxonomy plots interpretations along two axes: literal/historical versus spiritual/ongoing lack, and internal/personal versus external/corporate goals. If successful, this taxonomy will help future interpreters speak with far greater clarity about their own positions and the positions of others.

Colossians 1:24 comes at a critical juncture in the epistle, as Paul pivots from elevated prose (1:15–20) with an eschatological climax (1:21–23) into an apostolic apologia (1:24–2:3). This apologia, with its characteristic disclosure formula (Θέλω γὰρ ὑμᾶς εἰδέναι, 2:1), serves as the shift to the body of the Colossian epistle and forms the starting point of its central argument and purpose (as stated in 2:2–3). Thus, to grasp or fail to grasp the meaning of Colossians 1:24 in all its difficulty and all its beauty sets the reader up to grasp or fail to grasp the thrust of the epistle's opening argument. Even broader than Colossians studies, the verse provides a critical glimpse into how Paul was understood (whether by himself or by later Christians, as is argued by those who see Colossians as Deutero-Pauline). Moreover, within New Testament studies, Colossians 1:24 provides an essential building block in a theology of suffering. Whether for the sake of Colossians studies, Pauline studies, or New Testament studies, this verse with its *crux interpretum* is a matter of no little import. Yet, how does one begin the journey of interpreting this verse when the cartographers provide different maps for the verse's interpretation?

Creating a taxonomy of interpretations for Colossians 1:24 has proven to be one of the most inconsistent efforts among commentators and scholars as numerous interpretations of the verse have been offered over the years. Because the methods used to group varying interpretations differ, the loss of distinctions and similarities between views becomes inevitable, creating more imprecision in the articulation of interpretations. For this reason (as well as the general difficulty of the verse itself), commentators are frequently misunderstood and interpreted in a different light than intended.[1]

[1] This is often due to ambiguity on the original source's position, such as the back-and-forth observations of Douglas J. Moo, *The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon*, PNTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 149–53;

The entire field of Colossians study will benefit by standardizing its taxonomy of interpretations of Colossians 1:24. To move toward a standardized taxonomy of interpretations, this article will survey various taxonomies, suggest a new approach which accounts for all major interpretations, and address some possible challenges or outliers.

1. Various Taxonomies

As interpretations of Colossians 1:24 have expanded and amalgamated over time, so have the attempts to categorize them. In order to move toward a standardized taxonomy, the following groupings of interpretations will be reviewed and evaluated.

1.1. List-Type Taxonomies

Many opt for extended lists of interpretations.[2] Such an approach is helpful for its inclusion of every view but leaves later scholars to sort out the congruous from the incongruous. Why are some views closer to others? Which views are capable of amalgamation? For example, as Moule historically argued[3] (and, more recently, Barry Smith),[4] Paul could be *primarily* looking upward to the mystical union between Christ and his church while *simultaneously and secondarily* looking forward to the physical return and realization of that union when the Messianic Woes have worn down. Or, as Stettler argued,[5] Paul could *primarily* be looking outward to the completion of his missionary work while *simultaneously and secondarily* looking forward to the effect of that completed task—the return of the Messiah. Merely listing an array of separate views without providing an organizing structure or map is certainly better than nothing, but such an approach fails to advance the conversation around the verse.

1.2. Genitive- and Linguistic-Type Taxonomies

Others try to map the alternate views via the genitive use of "the afflictions of Christ,"[6] but the genitive here has only four or five possible options—few (or none) of which are (or is) mutually exclusive to any single view. To make matters worse, proponents of the same view frequently adopt differing

the tentative conclusions of F. F. Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians*, rev. ed., NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), 81–84; and the rambling and chaotic commentary of Markus Barth and Helmut Blanke, *Colossians*, trans. Astrid B. Beck, AB 34B (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974), 289–95.

[2] Such is the default for commentators when addressing interpretational difficulties, as in Scot McKnight, *The Letter to the Colossians*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2018), 187–89.

[3] C. F. D. Moule, *The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon*, CGTC (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1957), 76.

[4] Barry D. Smith, *Paul's Seven Explanations of the Suffering of the Righteous*, StBibLit 47 (New York: Lang, 2002), 182.

[5] Hanna Stettler, "An Interpretation of Colossians 1:24 in the Framework of Paul's Mission Theology," in *The Mission of the Early Church to Jews and Gentiles*, ed. Jostein Ådna and Hans Kvalbein, WUNT 127 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2000), 205–8.

[6] John Eadie, *A Commentary on the Greek Text of the Epistle of Paul to the Colossians* (Glasgow: Griffin, 1855), 88–89; Eduard Schweizer, *The Letter to the Colossians: A Commentary* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1982), 101–6; Petr Pokorný, *Colossians: A Commentary*, trans. Siegfried S. Schatzmann (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1990), 96–98; Lukas Bormann, *Der Brief des Paulus an die Kolosser*, THKNT 10/1 (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2012), 112–13.

genitive uses in this case. The most reasonable course of action seems to be that of Beale, who admits the nebulous nature of the genitive here.[7]

A variant approach is to sort interpretations using other linguistic arguments surrounding the verse.[8] If, after centuries of careful attention from some of the greatest scholars of the Greek language, a simple linguistic move has yet to put the proverbial "nail in the coffin" on the interpretation of Colossians 1:24, then efforts to make sense of the wide range of views on the verse ought not fall simplistically along linguistic lines. Further McKnight observes that the selection of a genitive use flows from one's overall disposition of the verse's meaning and not the other way around. If McKnight is correct, then to define the approaches to the verse primarily around the use of the genitive—or any other linguistic element—likely inverts the logical process and makes the secondary thing primary.[9]

1.3. Confessional-Type Taxonomies

Noteworthy taxonomies of interpretations have foregrounded confessional stances.[10] Reumann's contributions on the matter of Catholic-Protestant dialogue concerning this verse are noteworthy and valuable on their own. Such a taxonomy is most helpful when focused squarely on ecumenical matters and falters when tasked with providing a larger perspective concerning the positions on the verse. An ecumenical perspective provides only a secondary criterion for determining the interpretation of the verse, namely, the universality of a particular interpretation.

1.4. Interpreter-Oriented Taxonomies

Another approach is to survey key thinkers, touching on the influence of major theologians such as Karl Barth in the overall approach to the verse.[11] Such a narrative helpfully explains the history of thought because it avoids dealing with scholars who made little impact on the interpretation history, but it falls short of providing a matrix for sorting those views.

1.5. Binary-Type Taxonomies

Some approaches—although not, strictly speaking, "taxonomies"—evaluate the interpretations using a binary approach. For example, they may evaluate whether the application of the verse applies only to Paul or to the church as well,[12] or they may evaluate the extent to which the interpretations include a sort of vicarious outlook.[13] These sorts of binaries tend to function well when used to support a polemical approach to reception history. Either a view lands on one side, or it lands on another, and on that basis, the process of accepting and rejecting views becomes simpler.

[7] G. K. Beale, *Colossians and Philemon*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2019), 138–39 n. 10.

[8] For a two-part taxonomy built upon various senses of "lack," see Barth and Blanke, *Colossians*, 292–95.

[9] McKnight, *The Letter to the Colossians*, 187 n. 491.

[10] John Henry Paul Reumann, "Colossians 1:24 ('What Is Lacking in the Afflictions of Christ'): History of Exegesis and Ecumenical Advance," *CurTM* 17 (1990): 454–61.

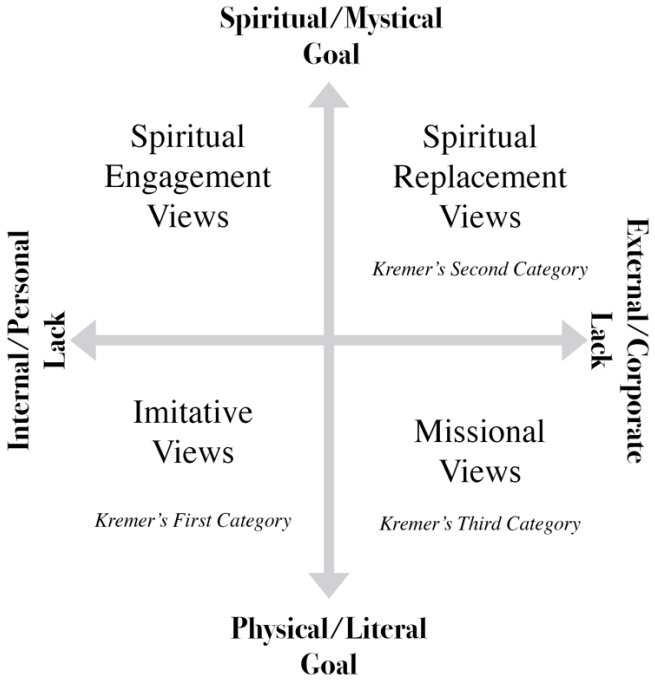
[11] G. de Ru, *Heeft Het Lijden van Christus Aanvulling Nodig? Onderzoek Naar de Interpretatie van Colossenzen 1:24* (Amsterdam: Uitgeverij ton Bolland, 1981), 39–71.

[12] Wesley Thomas Davey, *Suffering as Participation with Christ in the Pauline Corpus* (Lanham, MD: Fortress Academic, 2019), 107–17.

[13] Robin Anthony Steedman, "Colossians 1:24 and Vicarious Suffering in the Church" (PhD thesis, University of Birmingham, 2013), 65–141.

1.6. Conceptual-Type Taxonomies

Still others attempt a slightly broader scope and select three categories.[14] Kremer's incomparable reception history presses all of the views into three categories: (1) those who read the verse as Paul's reflections about Christ-like suffering that would need to happen in the realm of his own body, (2) those who read the verse as Paul's reflections on Christ's ongoing mystical sufferings with his body (the category into which the Messianic Woes are appendaged), and (3) those who read the verse as Paul's reflections on Christ's past sufferings being brought to fruition through Paul's missionary endeavors. The categories derived by Kremer truly encompass a wide range of views, but the taxonomy's greatest strength is also its greatest weakness. For example, Kremer's taxonomy takes a unique view such as the Messianic Woes interpretation and forces it into the same category as the mystical union view. It does not easily handle amalgamated views such as that of Stettler, which intersects categories two and three. It poorly accommodates emerging "centrist" views such as the participation view of Davey or the rhetorical-mimetic view of Sumney.



A path forward is possible via the minimalist approach of Kremer and those who follow him. The awkwardness of Kremer's tripartite matrix is avoidable by abstracting the three approaches one step further. Kremer's first category takes a very literal view of what is lacking and connects it to a narrow internal goal, forming the bottom-right quadrant on a Cartesian plane. Kremer's second category takes a very spiritual view of the lack and connects it to a broad ecclesial goal, forming the top-right quadrant. Kremer's third category takes a very literal view of the lack and connects it to a broad ecclesial goal, forming the bottom-right quadrant. When subdivided in this way, the tripartite matrix of Kremer begins to form into four quadrants, providing a vast range of flexibility for plotting views in a way that seems far

[14] Most notably, Jacob Kremer, *Was an den Leiden Christi noch mangelt: Eine interpretationgeschichtliche und exegetische Untersuchung zu Kol. 1,24b* (Bonn: Hanstein, 1956), 5–153.

less forced than Kremer's method. Quadrants also allow interpreters to visualize centrist and extreme views as well as views that are most susceptible to amalgamation. This shift from Kremer's three buckets to the proposed matrix with two spectrums allows the interpreter to use these continuums to map positions more accurately and with greater precision.

2. Implementing a Quadrant-Based Conceptual Taxonomy

To determine the value of this quadrant-based taxonomy, three steps are necessary. First, four views of the passage should define the extreme corners of the taxonomy. Second, centrist views should exist toward the middle of the taxonomy. And third, a mix of views will exist within each quadrant and will perhaps be centered between halves. The following survey will examine these three locations and map the key interpretations of Colossians 1:24 along those lines.

2.1. Extreme Views

A good quadrant-based taxonomy will account for the most extreme views at the outside corners of its periphery. The four corners of the proposed taxonomy of interpretations for Colossians 1:24 are enclosed within the following four views: Mystical Union, Christ Mysticism, Martyrdom (Perriman), and Gentile Mission.

2.1.1. Top-Right Quadrant: Mystical Union

Augustine of Hippo (354–430) developed a new perspective on Colossians 1:24 within his *Expositions on the Psalms*, where he says, "Unto this our common republic, as it were each of us according to our measure payeth that which we owe, and according to the powers which we have, as it were a quota [Latin: *canonem*] of sufferings we contribute."[15] Here Augustine takes the sufferings of Paul and moves them into a spiritual realm, visualizing them as all bound up in the Christian's mystical union with Christ. For Augustine, there is a quota, yet it is not a general quota but a quota that each individual disciple must pay as a tax as part of a "common republic."

John Calvin's (1509–1564) understanding of what it means to "fill up what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ" also hinges on the mystical union of believers with Christ. He explains, "As, therefore, Christ has suffered once in his own person, so he suffers daily in his members, and in this way there are filled up those sufferings which the Father hath appointed for his body by his decree."[16]

Martin Luther took the same view[17] and rolled back the clock to the Augustinian interpretation, opting for a Western interpretation of the passage over a lesser-known Eastern option. The next generation of Protestants carried forward what would become the standard Protestant interpretation of the verse for the next four centuries. For example, Melanchthon wrote, "The afflictions of the saints

[15] Augustine, *Expositions on the Book of Psalms* 62.2 (*NPNF* 8:251–52).

[16] John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Philippians, Colossians, and Thessalonians*, ed. John Pringle, reprint ed. (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2010), 164.

[17] Martin Luther, *Commentary on Galatians*, reprint ed. (Grand Rapids: Kregel Classics, 2006), 558. "By the Cross of Christ is not to be understood here the two pieces of wood to which He was nailed, but all the afflictions of the believers whose sufferings are Christ's sufferings." Luther goes on to cite Colossians 1:24.

are Christ's afflictions, therefore there is something lacking in the afflictions of Christ just for as long as there remain those who are afflicted."[18]

To place the mystical union view into the suggested taxonomy, two simple questions are appropriate. First, what is the realm of the suffering? Although Paul is suffering in real space-time history, the realm where suffering is brought to completion is in the spiritual and mystical world, not the physical world. The locus of the suffering is found in the co-suffering of Christ in his church in the spiritual or mystical realm. Second, what is the goal of the suffering? The goal is for Christ to join with his church in suffering. No distinct quota must be completed, only the completion of the church as the church is united with Christ in suffering. This goal is not distinct to Paul but rather focused more broadly in God's corporate work in his church.

This quadrant struggles with the challenge of concreteness, as does the next. Mystical sufferings that Christ experiences alongside his church have been occurring since the first century and continue unabated and exponentially increases in the twenty-first century. Paul's sufferings pour into the sufferings of Christ, but no sense is possible where "completion" or arriving at a quota occurs. The grammar of Colossians 1:24 with its focus on a definite quota makes it difficult to sustain interpretations in this quadrant.

2.1.2. Top-Left Quadrant: Christ Mysticism

The Christ mysticism approach is frequently mistaken for or subsumed into the mystical union view; however, it should stand on its own, and it helpfully demarcates a particular realm of approach to the text and demonstrates the value of the proposed taxonomy. Adolf Deissmann articulated such a view in the early twentieth century:

> In this Pauline passion-mysticism it is easy to recognise what I have called the undogmatic element in Paul. Dogmatic exegesis, which tortures itself over the problem of interpreting such passages and takes away from them their original simplicity by introducing into them an artificially forced "*as it were*," cannot express in theological terms the intimacy of this mystical contemplation of the passion. But under the cross of Jesus a suffering man will be able even to-day to experience for himself the depth of meaning and the comfort implied by Paul's sufferings of Christ.[19]

Deissman's interpretation here bears remarkable similarities to that of John Paul II.[20] Such an understanding shifts outward—to the experience that every Christian may have in the midst of suffering. These sufferers receive, by nature of their union with Christ, the ability to connect their personal suffering mystically with Christ himself. As John Paul II suggests, Christ has "opened his own redemptive suffering to all human suffering."[21] Such an interpretation differs from the traditional mystical union view in that Christ's sufferings are not seen here as continuing within the whole church in a mystical sense, but believers, instead, must mystically bind their own sufferings back to their suffering Savior.

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[18] Philipp Melanchthon, *Philipp Melanchthon's Werke: In einer auf dem allgemeinen Gebrauch berechneten Auswahl*, 6 vols. (Leipzig: Brockhaus, 1830), 4:228.

[19] Adolf Deissmann, *St. Paul: A Study in Social and Religious History*, trans. Lionel Richard Mortimer Strachan (New York: Hodder & Stoughton, 1912), 182.

[20] John Paul II, "*Salvifici Doloris*," 11 February 1984, https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_letters/1984/documents/hf_jp-ii_apl_11021984_salvifici-doloris.html.

[21] John Paul II, "*Salvifici Doloris*."

The twin evaluative questions will place the Christ mysticism view into the suggested taxonomy. First, what is the realm of the suffering? Although Paul is suffering in real space-time history, the realm where suffering is brought to completion is in the spiritual and mystical world, not the physical world. The locus of the suffering is found in the co-suffering of the crucified Christ and the contemplative Christian in the spiritual or mystical realm. Second, what is the goal of the suffering? The goal is for individual believers to join with Christ in his suffering. No distinct quota must be completed, only the completion and wholeness that occurs when people are united with Christ in suffering. This goal is not distinct to Paul, but it is similarly narrow as it involves the individual believer, not the church at large.

Both the mystical union and the Christ mysticism interpretations share the idea that the completion of suffering that Paul envisages in Colossians is something spiritual and mystical, a fullness of communion with Christ. But these two views are also markedly different. Although proponents use similar language, the two views find the key to Colossians 1:24 in different directions. The mystical union view finds the solution in Christ's union with his entire church and his presence in and with them in suffering. The Christ mysticism view finds the solution in the believer's individual entrance into the reality of their co-crucified, co-baptized, and co-resurrected state with Christ. The former finds answers in collective suffering, the latter in individual suffering. This same dynamic plays out in solutions that do not rely on a mystical or spiritual completion to the suffering.

The weakness of this quadrant is twofold. In Colossians 1:24, the afflictions of Christ are identifiable and quantifiable. The use of the articles in the verse drives this conclusion. The afflictions are something that Paul sees himself "completing" or "filling," not "entering." A mystical experience of the passion of Christ is inherently non-quantifiable, impossible to identify completely, and cannot receive completion or filling. In addition, Paul identifies his "completing" or "filling up" as an action done "for you." The direction in which it moves is not toward an end of self-fulfillment but toward an ecclesial or missional end.

2.1.3. Bottom-Left Quadrant: Martyrdom (Perriman)

A specific and extremely literal view of imitation finds its home in Perriman's influential 1991 article.[22] Perriman argues precisely in line with Abbott's imitation model;[23] however, Perriman presses against the obscurity of "completion" within imitation-based interpretations of Colossians 1:24. The verse implies that Paul is "making up the deficiency,"[24] and this is difficult to understand within a generalized typological or pattern/imitation model. So Perriman argues specifically toward Paul's commitment to martyrdom within the framework of Philippians 3: "Paul is speaking not of the inward dying and rising with Christ which is the experience of every believer but of his own radical personal commitment to suffer, if he is allowed to do so, to the full extent of the pattern of Christ's sufferings."[25] In other words, the pattern of Christ's sufferings in view here by Paul could only be "completed" when it reached the terminus of martyrdom.

The twin evaluative questions will place Perriman's martyrdom view into the suggested taxonomy. First, what is the realm of the suffering? The locus of the sufferings in view are about as tangible as one

[22] Andrew Perriman, "The Pattern of Christ's Sufferings: Colossians 1:24 and Philippians 3:10–11," *TynB* 42 (1991): 62–79.

[23] Perriman, "The Pattern of Christ's Sufferings," 63, 67.

[24] Perriman, "The Pattern of Christ's Sufferings," 68.

[25] Perriman, "The Pattern of Christ's Sufferings," 73.

can possibly imagine. The realm is "in my flesh." The suffering is found in Paul and Paul alone. Second, what is the goal of the suffering? The goal of the sufferings in view is also about as narrow as one can possibly imagine. According to Perriman the goal and completion of suffering is not found in Paul's ministry sufferings or his imprisonments. Instead, the goal of suffering toward which Paul moves is found at the tip of the executioner's sword in Rome. This will be the grand culminating event when the sufferings of Paul become like those of Christ.

The third quadrant struggles with the challenge of isolation. As the Christ mysticism view places Paul's personal mystical encounter with the passions of Christ front and center, so the martyrdom view places Paul's personal encounter with death at the hands of Rome as central to the meaning of Colossians 1:24. Again, the loss is a sense of benefit to the Colossians or the church at large. How can Paul portray a pursuit of martyrdom as "for you" (ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν)? In fact, in Philippians 1:21–26, Paul weighs a path that would lead him to a martyr's death and a path that would leave him alive and still ministering in the church. In Philippians 1:24, he concludes that remaining alive would be the path that is better for the sake of the Philippian church (δι' ὑμᾶς)—and perhaps his Gentile mission field more generally.

2.1.4. Bottom-Right Quadrant: Gentile Mission

Broadly speaking, this view begins from the premise that gospel advance does not occur apart from personal suffering within the church, of which the Apostle Paul was a prime exemplar.[26] Suffering "inevitably [accompanies] mission"[27] and is "an inherent part of Christian witness and ministry."[28] More narrowly, Paul's specific commission involved a call directly to the Gentiles (Rom 11:13) but also to an extended range of suffering (Acts 9:16).[29] As Schreiner states, drawing on the disclosure language of Colossians 1:26, "Paul through his sufferings, however, *extends* the message of Christ's all-sufficient death to the Gentiles, for such a message was concealed from the Gentiles during the life of Jesus of Nazareth."[30] This "worldwide mission" is what is still "outstanding,"[31] and the "fullness of the Gentiles" (Rom 11:1–24) is not yet complete.[32] Thus, the afflictions of Colossians 1:24 are "not redemptive but missionary in character."[33]

Although some proponents of this view skew in the direction of seeing it as a unique aspect of Paul's ministry,[34] others would suggest that it does secondarily extend to the church today.[35] Some

[26] John Piper, *Desiring God: Meditations of a Christian Hedonist*, 3rd ed. (Sisters, OR: Multnomah, 2003), 267.

[27] M. Dennis Hamm, *Philippians, Colossians, Philemon*, Catholic Commentary on Sacred Scripture (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013), 185.

[28] Steven W. Spivey, "Colossians 1:24 and the Suffering Church," *Journal of Spiritual Formation and Soul Care* 4.1 (2011): 51.

[29] The semantic range of ὅσος is of interest here, indicative of quantity or even space/geography.

[30] Thomas R. Schreiner, *Paul, Apostle of God's Glory in Christ: A Pauline Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2001), 102.

[31] Bormann, *Kolosser*, 114.

[32] Robert W. Wall, *Colossians and Philemon*, IVP New Testament Commentary Series 12 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 88.

[33] Andrew T. Lincoln, "Colossians," in *2 Corinthians to Philemon*, ed. Leander E. Keck, NIB 11 (Nashville: Abingdon, 2000), 614.

[34] Beale, *Colossians and Philemon*, 143; M. Cahill, "Neglected Parallelism in Colossians 1,24–25," *ETL* 68 (1992): 144.

[35] Kremer, *Was an den Leiden Christi noch mangelt*, 146; Spivey, "Colossians 1:24 and the Suffering Church," 53.

proponents of the Gentile-mission view ground the argument in an intertextual connection with the Isaianic Servant.[36] Such a perspective can be seen as anticipated in Lincoln and McDonald.[37] Yet another variation concerns the degree to which the Colossian church and the gospel's impact in their city is in view. Foster particularizes toward Paul's ministry for the Colossian church.[38] These variants provide a sense of the flexibility of the Gentile-mission perspective.

To put this view into conversation with the previous three, the two evaluative questions provide help. First, what is the realm of the suffering? The locus of the sufferings in view are found in the real world—the Roman Empire of Paul's day and, by extension, the unreached people of our own. Completion of suffering does not take place via mystical or spiritual or even eschatological means. Completion of suffering involves the carrying out of the missionary calling here and now. Second, what is the goal of the suffering? The goal of the suffering is not a personal or individual goal but a collective one. Paul intends the fullest extent of gospel proclamation, to the regions around Tarshish (Isa 60:9) and to the heart of the Empire itself. Such an ethno-geographic goal is necessarily accompanied by suffering.

Both the martyrdom and Gentile mission views share the idea that the completion of suffering that Paul envisages is tangible, physical, and this-worldly. Whether Paul's physical death or his physical proclamation among the Gentiles, there was a culminating event for Paul that was not abstract or mystical in any sense. Such a tangible extent of suffering was clear to Paul (Acts 9:16), even if it remains somewhat fuzzy for interpreters today who seek to understand him. But while the two views share much in common, they are both separated by the end goal. Perriman places the goal of Paul's suffering as a dash toward a personal aspiration toward martyrdom, when or where or how remains beside the point. The Gentile mission view places the goal of Paul's suffering as a dash toward a wide dispersion among the Gentiles and establishment of the gospel within the heart of the Roman Empire; the when or where or how of his martyrdom remains assumed but not centered.

The weakness of this quadrant is its penchant for exclusivity. Interpreters in this quadrant are more often prone to see Paul's statement in Colossians 1:24 as unique to his role in the cosmic work of divine reconciliation.[39] A second and smaller weakness in this category is the difficulty in defining the specific horizon Paul had in mind. Is Paul looking to a quota of Gentile converts? Is he pushing toward particular geographic contours for his Gentile ministry? Interpreters in this quadrant must address these weaknesses in order to make the best case for their position.

2.2. Centrist Views

With the four extreme views established, four centrist views are worth noting: the noble death reading of Sumney, the vicarious view of Steedman, Gupta's participation model, and Davey's participation model. These views are challenging to plot using the proposed taxonomy and perhaps expose a weakness in its method.

[36] Joel White, "Paul Completes the Servant's Sufferings (Colossians 1:24)," *Journal for the Study of Paul and His Letters* 6.2 (2016): 197–98.

[37] Lincoln, "Colossians," 614; H. D. McDonald, *Commentary on Colossians and Philemon* (Waco, TX: Word, 1980), 63–64.

[38] Paul Foster, *Colossians*, BNTC (New York: Bloomsbury, 2016), 217–19.

[39] See, for example, Bruce T. Clark, *Completing Christ's Afflictions: Christ, Paul, and the Reconciliation of All Things*, WUNT 2/383 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2015), 126–27.

2.2.1. Noble Death (Sumney)

Sumney's "noble death" proposal is one of the better known of these moderating perspectives.[40] In his 2006 article and his subsequent commentary,[41] Sumney argues using largely second-century (AD) sources that a relatively clear category existed for those who could suffer in a non-redemptive vicarious manner. The suffering speaker could then employ those sufferings with polemical force in order to move an audience toward a new position and to urge them to mimic the speaker's example.

2.2.2. Vicarious (Steedman)

Robin Steedman's comprehensive 2014 dissertation on the verse—an essential starting point for exploring Colossians 1:24—suggests a general "vicarious" suffering as the correct path forward.[42] By this, Steedman moves away from the Messianic Woes due to certain inconsistencies between the Jewish understanding of those woes and Paul's argument in Colossians. Steedman also dials back the sort of mathematical quota language by suggesting that Paul may not have been quite so precise in his language. Instead, Steedman sees Paul as contributing substantially to the common lot of sufferings that the church must bear. As part of the Body of Christ, Paul could do this work vicariously—the one in place of the many.

2.2.3. Participation (Gupta)

In his 2013 commentary, Nijay Gupta remarks that Paul's comments focus on two needs. First, there is the need for "his own bodily and fleshly participation."[43] Thus, Gupta emphasizes to some extent the literal and physical nature of the suffering. He then goes on to further explain, "The 'need' is for imitation of the weakness of Christ."[44] Such an assessment pulls Gupta toward a more internal/personal goal for the suffering. The imitation is loving and self-giving, but ultimately its success is measured mostly in terms of what happens *within Paul* and not what happens *within the church*.

2.2.4. Participation (Davey)

Another moderate interpretation is the "participation" model of Davey.[45] Davey expands on the participation/cruciformity concept of Michael Gorman. Davey sees an externally oriented participation wherein Paul's proclamation needed a presentation that would occur both in word and in deed. Similarly, all believers must—like Paul—respond to the cruciform call of Christ to suffer in such a participatory manner and pattern their living after the cross.

Davey's approach has a wide range of affinities with Sumney's (whose view Davey rejects) and a mystical connection with the passion of Christ that approaches that of the Christ mysticism view of John Paul II and Adolf Deissmann.[46] Another similarity appears in R. McL. Wilson's approach to the passage.[47] Wilson sees both the interplay of Messianic Woes *and* a sense of participation and suggests

[40] Jerry L. Sumney, "'I Fill Up What Is Lacking in the Afflictions of Christ': Paul's Vicarious Suffering in Colossians," *CBQ* 68 (2006): 664–80.

[41] Jerry L. Sumney, *Colossians: A Commentary*, NTL (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2008), 99–101.

[42] Steedman, "Colossians 1:24 and Vicarious Suffering in the Church."

[43] Nijay K. Gupta, *Colossians*, SHBC (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2013), 67.

[44] Gupta, *Colossians*, 67.

[45] Davey, *Suffering as Participation with Christ in the Pauline Corpus*.

[46] John Paul II, "*Salvifici Doloris*"; Deissmann, *St. Paul*, 182–83.

[47] R. McL. Wilson, *Colossians and Philemon*, ICC (London: Bloomsbury, 2005), 171–72.

that Hooker[48] and Taylor[49] support a participatory approach. Davey and Wilson differ in that Davey strongly rejects the inclusion of Messianic Woes in the understanding of the verse. In addition, Davey's handling of participation differs somewhat from Gupta in that Gupta's explanation includes language of "imitation"—language that leans more in the direction of those who interpret the verse as exclusively referring to Paul's internal sufferings.[50] The unique angle that Davey takes here has to do with an external presentation of the gospel message.

The centrist views of Sumney, Steedman, Gupta, and Davey force interpreters of this passage to look more closely, avoid simplistic reductions, and try to see how the views align and differ. The approach here has been to attempt to make distinctions where they appear to exist while admitting that these views are difficult to classify with immense precision within the proposed taxonomy.

2.3. Mediating Views

Alternative views exist along the spectrum in both directions. Generally, views that more narrowly focus on Paul's own physical or spiritual goals in the completion of suffering (the left two quadrants) are less common. The views that focus on external physical and spiritual goals in the completion of suffering (the right quadrants) are more common.

2.3.1. Mediating Views in the Top-Left Quadrant: None

This quadrant has, in this writer's estimation, no other views besides the extreme Christ mysticism view. On the one hand, a taxonomy with a lone view in a particular quadrant may raise some suspicions. But perhaps it exposes some challenges with interpreting the verse in an intensely individual and spiritualized direction, or perhaps it exposes a fruitful area of further investigation. In either case, it simply bears note that this quadrant remains relatively unpopulated for now.

2.3.2. Mediating Views in the Bottom-Left Quadrant: Imitation

Broadly speaking, all the interpreters in this category would posit that Paul is imitating the sufferings of Christ in his life and ministry. Some interpreters prefer to leave their summaries at this level of generality. One example of this kind of approach would be that of Trudinger.[51] After disputing the mystical view of Yates, Trudinger argues for Christ's sufferings in Colossians as a pattern to be imitated.[52] He continues, "[Paul] indeed rejoices thus to suffer for such suffering brings him nearer to his goal of being made conformable to Christ in His dying, so that he and the Church may attain to the resurrection."[53] The uniqueness of broadly imitative views such as that of Trudinger is how proponents would distinguish it from a thoroughgoing mystical union view such as that of Yates. Here are Trudinger's words: "'the things lacking' in *no* way apply to Christ, but to Paul."[54] This kind of general imitative interpretation,

[48] Morna D. Hooker, "ΠΙΣΤΙΣ ΧΡΙΣΤΟΥ," *NTS* 35 (1989): 339.
[49] Vincent Taylor, *The Atonement in New Testament Teaching* (London: Epworth, 1940), 104.
[50] Gupta, *Colossians*, 67.
[51] L. Paul Trudinger, "A Further Brief Note on Colossians 1:24," *EvQ* 45 (1973): 36–38.
[52] Trudinger, "A Further Brief Note on Colossians 1:24," 37.
[53] Trudinger, "A Further Brief Note on Colossians 1:24," 38.
[54] Trudinger, "A Further Brief Note on Colossians 1:24," 38 (emphasis his).

then, provides a category for other "pattern" views[55] and arguments for imitation[56] or even "inspiration"[57] among devotional writers.[58]

2.3.3. Mediating Views in the Top-Right Quadrant

The top-right quadrant is where broad replacement, representative, and substitutionary views belong. In this quadrant, the interpreter should expect to find views where the Paul of history or the Paul of legend is seen as performing meritorious acts, eschatological acts, or generally substitutionary acts to draw-down, limit, or eliminate the need for others to suffer. Views that see Paul as standing as a special representative of Christ in the means or manner of his proclamation also belong in this category.

2.3.3.1. Salvific

Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274) serves as the most notable proponent of the salvific interpretive tradition of Colossians 1:24. He provides the following key biblical grounds to provide support to the Roman Catholic doctrine surrounding indulgences:

> Now one man can satisfy for another, as we have explained above (*Supplementum* 13.2). And the saints in whom this super-abundance of satisfactions is found, did not perform their good works for this or that particular person, who needs the remission of his punishment (else he would have received this remission without any indulgence at all), but they performed them for the whole Church in general, even as the Apostle declares that he fills up "those things that are wanting of the sufferings of Christ … for His body, which is the Church" to whom he wrote (Colossians 1:24). These merits, then, are the common property of the whole Church. Now those things which are the common property of a number are distributed to the various individuals according to the judgment of him who rules them all. Hence, just as one man would obtain the remission of his punishment if another were to satisfy for him, so would he too if another's satisfactions be applied to him by one who has the power to do so.[59]

The defense of the practice of indulgences rested partly on the claim that Colossians 1:24 teaches that the merits of the saints become "common property" of the church, providing the means of satisfaction offered in the indulgences.

2.3.3.2. Replacement

A view that functions as an outgrowth of Eastern interpretation is the general "replacement" view. Chrysostom's argument in a missional direction contained the sense that Paul served as a battlefield replacement for Christ, absorbing suffering aimed at his Lord.[60] This sense is largely represented by

[55] George Johnston, *Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon*, Century Bible (London: Nelson, 1967), 60.

[56] W. H. Griffith Thomas, *Studies in Colossians and Philemon* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1986), 60–61.

[57] Roy L. Laurin, *Colossians: Where Life Is Established* (Findlay, OH: Dunham, 1948), 68.

[58] See also Everett F. Harrison, *Colossians: Christ All-Sufficient* (Chicago: Moody, 1971), 42.

[59] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, trans. Fathers of the Dominican Province (Notre Dame: Ave Maria, 1920), III q.25 a.1.

[60] Chrysostom, *Homilies on* Colossians, 4 (*NPNF* 13:276).

Gnilka's assessment that Christ is no longer capable of suffering, so Paul needed to take his place.[61] Similarly, Hendriksen says that "the apostle is undergoing these hardships in the place of Jesus since Jesus himself is no longer here to endure them."[62] Devotional writers such as Ironside and MacArthur use this approach as well.[63] This variation differs significantly from the other missional variations and shares deeper affinities with the mystical union and Messianic Woes views.

A recent scholarly example of the replacement view is that of James A. Kelhoffer.[64] In his 2010 monograph, Kelhoffer argues that the "lack" should be identified as Christ's physical presence and that the goal of Paul's suffering was "to preclude the necessity that the depicted addresses in their resurrected state would have to suffer as Christ and Paul did."[65] The goal of suffering, then, is something intangible to those outside such a spiritual state. Kelhoffer's unique contribution to the replacement view leaves many questions unanswered and rests on four heavily contested claims: the Deutero-Pauline source of Colossians, the use of ὑπέρ as substitution ("in place of"), Colossians 1:24 as disjunctive with the Pauline corpus, and Colossians functioning with an entirely realized eschatology. Despite Kelhoffer's tenuous position, he does represent a growing trend of interpreters who are exploring beyond the established options in search of more satisfying readings of the passage.

2.3.3.3. Mission-Presentation (Schweizer)

Another identifiable group of interpretations is that which argues for the mission-presentation view. Whereas the mission-appropriation view argues for a gap between the accomplishment of redemption and the appropriation of it in a wider sense, the mission-presentation view skews more individually to Paul and the way that he needed to present the gospel. Schweizer suggests that "it is only the suffering which the apostle takes upon himself that really allows his message to become credible."[66] Thus, Paul's suffering for his gospel impinges upon the credibility of his gospel. Hence, Paul must, according to John Paul Heil, make Christ present to the Colossians via his suffering.[67] Paul is making "Christ's bodily presence"[68] visible through his preaching, even by the proxy of Epaphras. Conzelmann is close to this approach when he identifies the two themes of this verse as representation and preaching.[69] Hay leans in this direction as well but assigns this sort of lofty assessment of apostolic preaching to the sloppiness of a later writer.[70] This view shares affinities with Sumney's "noble death" proposal but with a less dogmatic assumption about the effect of Paul's suffering and a more generalized view of its extent.

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[61] Joachim Gnilka, *Der Kolosserbrief*, HThKNT 10 (Basel: Herder, 1980), 98.

[62] William Hendriksen, *Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon*, New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979), 86.

[63] H. A. Ironside, *Lectures on the Epistle to the Colossians* (Neptune, NJ: Loizeaux Brothers, 1929), 56; John MacArthur, *Colossians and Philemon*, The MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody, 1992), 76.

[64] James A. Kelhoffer, *Persecution, Persuasion & Power: Readiness to Withstand Hardship as a Corroboration of Legitimacy in the New Testament*, WUNT 270 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010), 70–78.

[65] Kelhoffer, *Persecution, Persuasion & Power*, 77.

[66] Schweizer, *The Letter to the Colossians*, 105.

[67] John Paul Heil, *Colossians: Encouragement to Walk in All Wisdom as Holy Ones in Christ*, ECL 4 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2010), 85.

[68] David E. Garland, *Colossians and Philemon*, NIVAC (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), 122.

[69] Hans Conzelmann, "Der Brief an die Kolosser," in *Die Briefe and die Galater, Epheser, Philipper, Kolosser, Thessalonicher und Philemon*, NTD 8 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1976), 187–88 ("vertritt … Predigt").

[70] David M. Hay, *Colossians*, ANTC (Nashville: Abingdon, 2000), 73–74.

2.3.3.4. Empire

For Brian Walsh and Sylvia Keesmaat, writing in the post-9/11 milieu, the verse pushes back against imperial oppression and the subversive politics that put Jesus on the cross.[71]

2.3.3.5. Messianic Woes

The Messianic Woes interpretation grew and developed out of German Oriental studies in the early nineteenth century.[72] For around a century, it remained relatively obscure and often amalgamated with the mystical union view. Not until the second half of the twentieth century did the view come into its own. It gained greater momentum as eschatologically oriented (re)understandings of Paul with renewed emphases on Second Temple texts surged to the fore.[73] Extensive debates over the issue of Colossians 1:24 flared up, and the mystical union view received an ultimate knock-out punch.[74] Meanwhile, the Messianic Woes view was reiterated with increasing force and precision by the leading NT scholars and the best commentaries on Colossians.

The Messianic Woes interpretation argues that "the afflictions of the Christ" in Colossians 1:24 is a variation on the technical Hebrew phrase, "the woes of the Messiah." In this sense, Paul claims to be serving a broad ecclesial goal by spiritually absorbing unique eschatological suffering at a disproportionate rate, enabling him to rejoice in his sufferings and to anticipate an earlier return of the Messiah as a result.

[71] Brian J. Walsh and Sylvia C. Keesmaat, *Colossians Remixed: Subverting the Empire* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2004), 228–29.

[72] The first connection between Colossians 1:24 and the Messianic Woes appears to be Eadie, *Colossians*, 87. This interpretation, however, remained unexplored by other English commentators until the view was fully developed by German scholars. See, in particular, Albert Klöpper, *Der brief an die Colosser: kritisch untersucht und in seinem verhältnisse zum paulinischen lehrbegriff exegetisch und biblisch-theologisch erörtert* (Berlin: Reimer, 1882), 309; Wilhelm Lueken, "Der Briefe an Philemon, and Die Kolosser Und an Die Epheser," in *Die Schriften Des Neuen Testaments*, ed. Johannes Weiss (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1908), 339; Martin Dibelius, *Handbuch zum Neuen Testament: An die Kolosser Epheser an Philemon* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1927), 16; Ernst Lohmeyer, *Die Briefe an die Philipper, an die Kolosser und an Philemon* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1956), 78; Hans Windisch, *Paulus und Christus: Ein biblisch-religionsgeschichtlicher vergleich* (Leipzig: Hindrichs, 1934), 246.

[73] See, e.g., E. P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism: A Comparison of Patterns of Religion* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977).

[74] The following series of back-and-forth articles in *The Evangelical Quarterly* proved the inability of a "corporate personality" interpretation of the passage to withstand sustained critique: Roy Yates, "A Note on Colossians 1:24," *EvQ* 42 (1970): 88–92; Trudinger, "A Further Brief Note on Colossians 1:24," 36–38; Richard J. Bauckham, "Colossians 1:24 Again: The Apocalyptic Motif," *EvQ* 47 (1975): 168–70.

The Messianic Woes interpretation is far-and-away the dominant view among English-language scholarship.[75] But this view is losing ground in recent years to views in the bottom-right quadrant.[76]

2.3.4. Mediating Views in the Bottom-Right Quadrant

The bottom-right quadrant is one of the oldest categories of interpretation, finding its source in the Eastern commentators. Theodore of Mopsuestia (c. 350–428) writes as follows:

> Since Christ, coming before, suffered to bring you benefit, so that he might proclaim you to be his body through the resurrection, I am filling up what was lacking in his afflictions by those that will be for you. What was it that was lacking? That by learning what are those things that have been accomplished for you, you may receive the promise of them. But this can by no means be done without toil and afflictions. Therefore, I suffer for this, going about and preaching to all, those things that have been accomplished, so that by

[75] Wilfred L. Knox, *St Paul and the Church of the Gentiles* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1939), 134–36; C. K. Barrett, "The Apostles in and after the New Testament," *SEÅ* 21 (1956): 42–43; Moule, *The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon*, 76; George H. P. Thompson, "Ephesians 3:13 and 2 Timothy 2:10 in the Light of Colossians 1:24," *ExpTim* 71 (1960): 187–89; George H. P. Thompson, *The Letters of Paul to the Ephesians to the Colossians and to Philemon*, CBC (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967), 139; Stephen Neill, *Paul to the Colossians*, World Christian Books 50 (New York: Association, 1964), 35; John Austin Baker, *The Foolishness of God* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1970), 239n2; Ralph P. Martin, *Colossians and Philemon*, NCB (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1973), 70; Ralph P. Martin, *Ephesians, Colossians, and Philemon*, Int (Atlanta: John Knox, 1991), 112; Bauckham, "Colossians 1:24 Again"; James D. G. Dunn, *Jesus and the Spirit* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1975), 113; Dunn, *The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 114–16; James Houlden, *Paul's Letters from Prison: Philippians, Colossians, Philemon, and Ephesians*, Pelican (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1977), 181; Peter T. O'Brien, *Colossians, Philemon* (Waco, TX: Word, 1982), 75–80; John Henry Paul Reumann, "Colossians," in *Ephesians and Colossians*, ACNT (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1985), 133; John Henry Paul Reumann, "Colossians 1:24 ('What Is Lacking in the Afflictions of Christ'): History of Exegesis and Ecumenical Advance," *CurTM* 17 (1990): 454–61; N. T. Wright, *The Epistles of Paul to the Colossians and to Philemon*, TNTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 88–90; Murray J. Harris, *Colossians and Philemon* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 60; Richard Melick, *Philippians, Colossians, Philemon*, NAC 32 (Nashville: Broadman, 1991), 239–40; Thomas J. Sappington, *Revelation and Redemption at Colossae*, JSNTSup 53 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1991), 189; Robert G. Bratcher and Eugene Albert Nida, *A Handbook on Paul's Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1993), 37; Craig S. Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament*, 2nd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2014), 572; Clinton E. Arnold, "Colossians," in *Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, Philemon*, Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), 83–84; Ben Witherington III, *The Letters to Philemon, the Colossians, and the Ephesians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 144–45; Michael F. Bird, *Colossians and Philemon* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2009), 64–66; David W. Pao, *Colossians and Philemon*, ZECNT (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 124–26; John A. Kitchen, *Colossians and Philemon for Pastors* (The Woodlands, TX: Kress Biblical Resources, 2012), 136–37; Richard Chin, *Captivated by Christ* (Sydney: Matthias Media, 2019), 51.

[76] Without attempting to be nearly as exhaustive, the following examples of recent Colossians commentaries taking a missional approach is worthy of note, especially as this uptick compares to the drop in commentators holding the Messianic Woes interpretation during the same period: Bormann, *Kolosser*, 114; McKnight, *The Letter to the Colossians*, 188–89; G. K. Beale, *Colossians and Philemon*, 136; Alan J. Thompson, *Colossians and Philemon: An Introduction and Commentary*, TNTC 12 (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2022), 78–80.

> believing with the soul's affection you may gain familial intimacy with him. For it is of these things that I have taken my place as a minister.[77]

For Theodore, the lack was not on the sufficiency of the sacrifice of Christ but in the learning and receiving of it.[78] This, then, drove Paul to extend that message "to all," pushing through ethnic and geographical boundaries in the process.

Theodoret of Cyrus (c. 393–c. 457) followed closely in the interpretational and theological vein of Theodore. Theodoret produced his commentary on the Pauline epistles late in his life and maintained a level of clarity and precision that at many points exceeds his Antiochene predecessors. In his commentary on Colossians, Theodoret writes, "But that which was being left was the preaching to the Gentiles, and the showing forth/exhibition/representation of salvation's generous patron."[79]

This significant Eastern interpretation casts additional light on the ministerial efforts of Paul. Theodoret sees the "lack" that Paul is "filling up" as Gentile proclamation and the revelation of Christ's salvific generosity. As with Theodore, so with Theodoret—the deficiency is not in the sacrifice or in the wealth of Christ (visualized as a wealthy patron of the arts) but in the proclamation and response to that generous gift.

This broad stream of mission-oriented interpretations continues to hold sway and is increasing in popularity in recent years. Perhaps some of this influence, besides the historical depth of the view, comes from the fact that two of the most extensive monographs investigating Colossians 1:24—those of Kremer and Clark—endorse mission-oriented views. Particularly notable is Clark's well-argued case for Paul's unique ministry of reconciliation in view here in Colossians 1:24.[80]

2.3.4.1. Eschatological-Mission

Stettler argues for an eschatological-mission view that combines the Messianic Woes view with a missional view. She argues that "if we bear in mind that before the Parousia, the number of the Gentiles (Rom 11:25 or, as 4 Ezra 4:35–37 has it, of the righteous) must be filled up through the Gentile mission, it follows that there is a certain amount of suffering related to that number, which needs to be filled up and will be achieved one day."[81] Thus, for Stettler, the quota is neither an abstract amount of sufferings nor a quantity of martyrs but the somewhat less abstract sufferings tied specifically to the Gentile mission, to which Paul contributed a lion's share. Yet Stettler argues that her interpretation could jettison the Messianic Woes view specifically and retain its overall thrust via an appeal to a general eschatological connection between the mission of Paul and the parousia.[82]

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[77] Theodore of Mopsuestia, *On Colossians* 1.24–25a (Rowan A. Greer, trans., *Theodore of Mopsuestia: The Commentaries on the Minor Epistles of Paul* [Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2010], 397).

[78] Theodore of Mopsuestia, *On Colossians* 1.24–25a. τὸ μαθόντας ὑμᾶς τίνα ἐστὶν τὰ ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν κατορθωθέντα παρ' αὐτοῦ, δέξασθαι τὴν περὶ αὐτῶν ἐπαγγελίαν // ut discentes, quae sunt illa quae correcta sunt pro uobis, suscipiatis de illis promissionem.

[79] Theodoret of Cyrus, *On Colossians* 1.24 (Robert C. Hill, trans., *Commentary on The Letters of St Paul*, 2nd ed. [Brookline, MA: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2007], 2:90). Ἐλείπετο δὲ τὸ κηρύξαι τοῖς ἔθνεσι, καὶ δεῖξαι τῆς σωτερίας τὸν μεγαλόδωρον χορηγόν.

[80] For example, see Clark, *Completing Christ's Afflictions*, 162.

[81] Stettler, "An Interpretation of Colossians 1:24," 205.

[82] Stettler, "An Interpretation of Colossians 1:24," 203.

Stettler's approach has made a distinct impact, and an identifiable strain of recent interpreters show the interplay between eschatology and mission in this verse.[83] This view has a rich past, appearing in a simplified form in Masson[84] and Kamlah[85] as well as the thorough, little-known, and precise article by Gustafson.[86] The difference between the view of Stettler and some others within this strain of interpreters is her primacy of a missional sense over an eschatological sense.

2.3.4.2. Missional-Christoformity (McKnight)

McKnight argues for a "missional-Christoformity" view. He suggests that Paul is "engaging in the same kind of intentionally shaped mission and suffering *after the death of Jesus*: he evangelizes the world in order to bring the gospel's saving benefits to those in the world, knowing that the death sentence of Jesus was reversed in the resurrection."[87] It is easy to find deep similarities between McKnight's view and Davey's participation model, yet the former emphasizes the ecclesial mission somewhat more than the mystical participation in Christ while still retaining both. Thus, McKnight states, "Paul sees himself as en-fleshing the ministry of Christ in his apostolic mission for the em-bodied body of Christ…. This view, then, refocuses the suffering away from the eschatological tribulation toward a Christoformity in ecclesial mission."[88] McKnight also bears some similarities with mission-presentation views of Schweizer, Garland, and others. McKnight's view, however, stands somewhat distinct in that it is not so much about Christoformity in proclamation as it is about Christoformity in all of life (body, soul, mission, church, *and* preaching). It might be possible to see McKnight's proposal as a confluence between multiple mission-oriented and moderating views. One scholar who stands close to McKnight is Marianne Meye Thompson, who combines the ideas of participation, mission, and eschatological woes into a composite view that serves as a middle ground between McKnight and Stettler.[89]

2.3.4.3. Mission-Appropriation

Pokorný echoes Theodore of Mopsuestia to a degree when he argues for the mission-appropriation view. After linking the completion of Christ's afflictions in verse 24 with "making fully known the word of God" in verse 25, Pokorný summarizes that "apostolic suffering is not a struggle for Christ in the form of the church as his spiritual body, but a struggle for the church in the power of Christ."[90] This comes at a point of tension between "the exaltation of Jesus [1:15–20] and the reconciliation of all things [1:21–23]."[91] That exaltation is complete, but the reconciliation is in an already-not-yet state. Thus, for

[83] Lewis R. Donelson, *Colossians, Ephesians, First and Second Timothy, and Titus*, Westminster Bible Companion (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1996), 34; Todd D. Still, "Colossians," in *Ephesians–Philemon*, , ed. Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland, rev. ed., EBC 12 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), 299; Christopher R. Seitz, *Colossians*, Brazos Theological Commentary on the Bible (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2014), 108; Anthony C. Thiselton, *Colossians: A Short Exegetical and Pastoral Commentary* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2020), 48–49.

[84] Charles Masson, "L'Épitre de Saint Paul aux Colossiens," in *Commentaire du Nouveau Testament* (Paris: Delachaux & Niestlé, 1950), 10:111.

[85] E. Kamlah, "Wie Beurteilt Paulus sein Leiden? Ein Beitrag zur Untersuchung seiner Denkstruktur," *ZNW* 54 (1963): 229 n. 55.

[86] Henry Gustafson, "The Afflictions of Christ: What Is Lacking?" *BR* 8 (1963): 28–42.

[87] McKnight, *The Letter to the Colossians*, 190.

[88] McKnight, *The Letter to the Colossians*, 190–91.

[89] Marianne Meye Thompson, *Colossians and Philemon*, Two Horizons (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 79.

[90] Pokorný, *Colossians*, 99.

[91] Pokorný, *Colossians*, 99.

Pokorný, "what is still 'lacking' is the appropriation of the already complete salvation."[92] The goal, then, is external to Paul—a particular response to Paul's gospel. The quota is substantially literal and physical—a realization of Christ's reconciliatory work in the transformed lives of saints.

The view of Pokorný is close to that of Percy, whose influential treatise on the relationship between Ephesians and Colossians carefully addresses this passage. Percy argues that between the lack and the fullness—something that cannot be on Paul's part but must refer in some way to Jesus's earthly work—is a gap of maturity in the church,[93] both internally and externally.[94] As the unique mission of Paul is appropriated in the church, that gap begins to close.[95] In a similar vein, Barclay uses the language of "the Church must be upbuilt and extended" in reference to the "lack" in Colossians 1:24.[96]

The mission-appropriation view abuts the imitative view in some respects. The difference is that the suffering is not found so much within Paul's imitating the work of Christ (with a potential byproduct of imitation by the Colossians) but toward the church, and its purpose is entirely consumed not by whether Paul is successful in appropriating the example of Jesus but in whether the church is successful in appropriating the message of Jesus.

3. Unaccounted "Views"

The proposed taxonomy for Colossians 1:24 struggles to take into account a series of interpretive decisions that are not views themselves but are used to account for various views. Although proponents for these interpretive decisions often believe these views to be holistic solutions to the challenge of the verse, they do not in-and-of-themselves constitute a true interpretation of the passage. The following list accounts for some of these unaccounted outlooks.

3.1. Linguistic Decisions

In the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, efforts to solve the challenge of Colossians 1:24 by means of linguistics abounded. For the proponents of the following arguments, these linguistic moves have the effect of closing the interpretive case for their views of the verse. Four such interpretations are worthy of note.

First, Schweizer follows others suggesting an objective genitive for τῶν θλίψεων τοῦ Χριστοῦ.[97] Schweizer thus sees this as a reference of Paul's afflictions *for Christ*. This linguistic move has the effect of quickly simplifying the challenge of the verse and supporting Schweizer's generally ministerial interpretation of the passage.

[92] Pokorný, *Colossians*, 99–100.

[93] Ernst Percy, *Die Probleme der Kolosser- und Epheserbriefe* (Lund: Gleerup, 1946), 130.

[94] Percy, *Die Probleme der Kolosser- und Epheserbriefe*, 132.

[95] Percy, *Die Probleme der Kolosser- und Epheserbriefe*, 132–34.

[96] William Barclay, *The Letters to the Philippians, Colossians, and Thessalonians*, rev. ed., Daily Study Bible (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1975), 126–27.

[97] Schweizer, *The Letter to the Colossians*, 101–6.

Second, Barth-Blanke[98] along with Flemington[99] and Perriman's revised position[100] order the sentence to make the prepositional phrase "in my flesh" to modify ὑστερήματα rather than the expected verbal modification. This linguistic move has a similar effect as the first. The realm or location of the "afflictions of Christ" moves to Paul's flesh or his body. This sort of interpretation favors the heavily author-oriented interpretations of Colossians 1:24 (such as Perriman's) but is also deployed by those who see a more apostolic or ministerial bent in the verse (such as Flemington and Barth-Blanke).

Third, Perriman's original position[101] along with others such as Abbott,[102] Hoskyns and Davey,[103] and Smiles[104] deploy arguments surrounding the Greek word order and take τῶν θλίψεων τοῦ Χριστοῦ ἐν τῇ σαρκί μου as a compound modifier of ὑστερήματα. This linguistic move has an effect very similar to the second. The partitive "lack" Paul is filling is defined as a sort of "Christ-affliction" within the realm of Paul's flesh—or, as it is often phrased, "filling up what is lacking of the-afflictions-of-Christ-in-my-flesh." This sort of interpretation works well for those who maintain a heavy author orientation in this passage.

Fourth, Kremer and Clark have done a great service for successive interpreters of Colossians 1:24 by reflecting substantially on the double-prefixed ἀνταναπληρῶ.[105] They make two observations: (1) the double-prefixed form indicates "over against," implying another source supplying something from another direction, and (2) the double-prefixed form more narrowly speaks to the "completing" of a thing rather than the general "filling" of it. Kremer applies this linguistic move to support a more mission-oriented interpretation of the verse, while Clark uses it to support his own unique (but still mission-oriented) interpretation that focuses on the cosmic reign of Christ.

In summary, these four linguistic arguments add to the overall debate surrounding the verse, and future interpreters of the passage must respond to each. Many of the recent studies[106] on Colossians 1:24 spend additional time addressing these claims, and clearer counterpoints and adaptations have developed. Overall, none of these arguments seems to have won the day for any particular interpretation. The arguments are either brushed aside or adapted to fit another interpretation of the verse.

3.2. Contextual Decisions

Another refreshing shift in recent years has been the pressure by Clark and Cahill to better integrate the interpretation of Colossians 1:24 with its context—whether that be the elevated language of cosmic Christology in 1:15–20[107] or the mission-oriented language of "fulfilling" in 1:25,[108] the effort to integrate

[98] Barth and Blanke, *Colossians*, 295.

[99] W. F. Flemington, "On the Interpretation of Colossians 1:24," in *Suffering and Martyrdom in the New Testament: Studies Presented to G. M. Styler by the Cambridge New Testament Seminar*, ed. William Horbury and Brian McNeil (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 87.

[100] Andrew Perriman, "The Shortfall in Christ's Sufferings: Mystical Union, Messianic Woes, the Hardships of Evangelism, or None of the Above?" P.OSTOST, 11 October 11 2020, https://tinyurl.com/5n6rkam7.

[101] Perriman, "The Pattern of Christ's Sufferings."

[102] T. K. Abbott, *Ephesians and Colossians*, ICC (London: Bloomsbury, 1909), 232.

[103] Sir Edwyn Hoskyns and Noel Davey, *The Riddle of the New Testament* (London: Faber & Faber, 1968), 158.

[104] Vincent M. Smiles, *First Thessalonians, Philippians, Second Thessalonians, Colossians, Ephesians*, New Collegeville Bible Commentary (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2005), 78.

[105] Kremer, *Was an den Leiden Christi noch mangelt*, 156–63; Clark, *Completing Christ's Afflictions*, 13–50.

[106] See, e.g., Davey, *Suffering as Participation with Christ in the Pauline Corpus*, 109; White, "Paul Completes the Servant's Sufferings," 189–91.

[107] Clark, *Completing Christ's Afflictions*, 72–99.

[108] Cahill, "Neglected Parallelism in Colossians 1,24–25."

the text more carefully with its context has added significantly to the scholarly discourse surrounding the verse. Rather than the generalized surveys of the immediate context or omission of the immediate context in favor of broader Pauline or Second Temple contexts that have been offered in the past,[109] recent scholarship has begun to think more deeply about the effect of their interpretations on the immediate literary context and on the original readers.[110] The largest impact of these contextual efforts has been to underscore the weakness of the Messianic Woes interpretation.

3.3. Intertextual Decisions

A final area of research that is impacting the interpretation of Colossians 1:24 is the effort to engage in robust intertextual dialogue with the Old Testament to ascertain Paul's use of "servant" and "suffering" language. Recent works by White[111] and Stettler[112] have underscored connections between Paul's language here in Colossians 1:24 and particularly the second Servant Song of Isaiah 49:1–13. These approaches come to Colossians with a robust portrait of Paul's interplay with Isaiah 49 in the background and read the verse through that lens. Although far from definitive, modern interpreters must engage these intertextual arguments and may do well to posit their own.

In short, all these decisions are areas that demand exploration on their own. It may even be said that efforts to interpret Colossians 1:24 without considering issues of linguistics, context, and intertext are fundamentally flawed. But, for the most part, these insights are observations in search of a cohesive interpretation. Each decision may lend weight to one of the previously evaluated views, but they can remain outside the taxonomy as a broader matrix of questions that should be asked and answered for each view.

4. Conclusion

Below is a quadrant-based taxonomy that places all the major interpretations of Colossians 1:24 on two spectrums. The x axis ranges from a lack that is grounded in literal and historical sufferings of Paul and/or Christ on the left to grounded in spiritual and ongoing sufferings of Paul and/or Christ and/or the church on the right. The y axis ranges from suffering intended to complete a narrow goal connected internally to Paul himself at the bottom to suffering intended to complete a broad goal connected externally to the church or the world at the top. Such a system allows for the Christ mysticism view to be differentiated properly from the mystical union view, despite certain surface-level similarities.

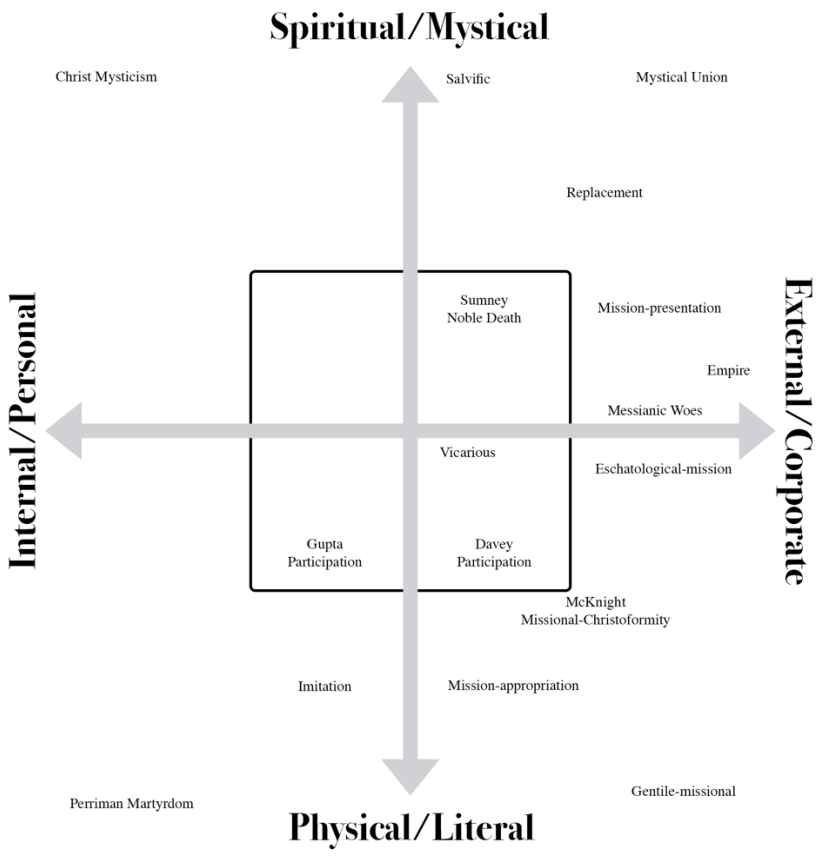
In favor of this quadrant method are several noteworthy observations. First, the selection of the x axis of internal/personal versus external/corporate and the y axis of literal/historical and spiritual/ongoing functionally plots all the major views of Colossians 1:24 without much difficulty. None of these views seems arbitrarily placed or forced. Second, the four quadrants are not immediately inferior or superior to each other; no clear polemical "low ground" exists in any one quadrant because each area is supported by other passages in the Pauline corpus. Each quadrant has its share of strengths and weaknesses, allowing proponents of each view to adopt and adapt the model more easily. In short, this

[109] See, e.g., the lack of any discernible connection to the surrounding context of the verse in Wright, *The Epistles of Paul to the Colossians and to Philemon*, 87–90.

[110] Gupta, *Colossians*, 66–67; Thompson, *Colossians and Philemon*, 79.

[111] White, "Paul Completes the Servant's Sufferings," 194–98.

[112] Stettler, "An Interpretation of Colossians 1:24," 194.



taxonomy properly functions as a classification tool (i.e., asking, "How do these relate?") rather than as an evaluation tool (i.e., asking, "Which of these is broken?"). Third, this taxonomy provides clarity for the existence of certain kinds of amalgamating views. For example, it would make sense for a Messianic Woes view to amalgamate either toward a mystical union view or toward a mission-oriented view. Views that bridge between the martyrdom view and the mission views are also likely. Fourth, the closer the views are to the center (i.e., the "centrist" views), the more difficult they are to map with precision. The square in the center of the taxonomy demarcates such centrist views.

This taxonomy should be seen as tentatively offering the first effort to create a conceptual map of the swath of interpretations of the verse, aimed at capturing what seem to be the *primary* emphases of the views. Any preliminary cartography will need correction. Future scholars may need to refine and adjust this paradigm or fine-tune the placement of the views on the map, but it represents a substantial step toward clarity and precision in the interpretation of what may be one of the most fascinating and heavily studied verses in the book of Colossians.

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Slavery, Submission, and Separate Spheres: Robert Dabney and Charles Hodge on the Submission of Wives and Enslaved People

— Isaac Tuttle —

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Abstract: Robert Dabney and Charles Hodge were two of the most influential Presbyterian theologians of nineteenth-century America. This paper is a comparative analysis of how they each thought about submission in the institutions of marriage and slavery. As a theologian, professor, and Confederate chaplain, Robert Dabney developed stringent arguments for both slavery and patriarchy, wedding them in his defense of hierarchy and the social order. The Princeton theology professor Charles Hodge represents a moderate approach to both the question of slavery and marital relations, but his nuance did not prevent him from slipping into the cultural assumptions of his day.

Several first wave feminist leaders linked the struggle for women's rights with the struggle to end slavery. Similarly, many pro-slavery advocates linked these causes with the alternative intention of securing a patriarchal order over both white women and enslaved people. For the sake of simplicity, many scholars have studied the submission of wives and slaves in isolation, even though some feminists and pro-slavery advocates explicitly connected them. Scholars run the risk of misunderstanding complex connections when they focus on only one concept that is logically connected to a person's overarching worldview. Instead, this article ventures into the complexity of two similar perspectives on two related topics. Southern Presbyterian minister Robert Dabney recognized an indissoluble correlation between the submission of slaves to masters and the submission of wives to husbands. Northern Presbyterian theologian Charles Hodge noted significant distinctions between the two. This study does not attempt to vindicate Dabney or Hodge's views but to understand the consistencies and inconsistencies of their ideas in their historical context. While both men were products of their time, the fact that they shared so many beliefs and still disagreed on notable issues reveals the role cultural context often plays in biblical interpretation. This article argues that while Dabney strongly supported slavery and staunchly opposed any form of egalitarianism, Hodge articulated nuanced and easily misunderstood views on both slavery and women's roles. This is not, however, a study of their views on women and chattel slavery writ large; it is a comparative analysis of how they thought about submission in the institutions of marriage and slavery. Hodge and Dabney shared many philosophical and theological con-

victions, but their distinct political and cultural commitments informed their biblical interpretations.

As a theologian, professor, and Confederate chaplain, Robert Dabney developed stringent arguments for both slavery and patriarchy, wedding them in his defense of hierarchy and the social order. Dabney's pro-slavery apologetic was not merely a defense of slavery. His pro-slavery arguments were informed by his patriarchal, anti-democratic, aristocratic republicanism.[1] Of course, Dabney was not the only nineteenth-century theologian to grapple with the relationship between husbands and wives, and masters and slaves. The Princeton theology professor Charles Hodge represents a moderate approach to both the question of slavery and marital relations, even though his ideas still bore the stains of his historical moment.

Dabney and Hodge were both Old School Presbyterians and thus theologically likeminded in most regards; nonetheless, they resided in different sections of the country and the 1861 regional rift in the Old School body separated them for the rest of their lives. Robert Dabney's commitment to southern hierarchies gave his thought a great deal of consistency. His political theology was grounded in patriarchal hierarchy, which is why he strongly opposed abolitionism, feminism, and public education, all of which he believed had the same problem: a democratic shift towards individual autonomy and away from white patriarchal authority. Charles Hodge exhibited more nuance, drawing conclusions on the topics of slavery and women's rights that both accorded with and defied his cultural context. His nuance did not prevent him from slipping into the cultural assumptions of his day, but even when he parroted such assumptions as if they were novel, his views were rational, measured, and tempered in a way that Dabney's were not.

There are many reasons why these men and their views deserve attention.[2] They were both professors who trained many ministers in the North and South. Dabney taught at Union Seminary in Virginia, which was under the control of southern synods and attracted southern students almost exclusively.[3] Hodge taught at Princeton Seminary, which attracted many students from both the North and the South.[4] Hodge and Dabney were men who thought deeply about a variety of issues, and they defended their beliefs in books, periodicals, presbytery meetings, general assemblies, and classrooms.

[1] R. Dean Davenport, "Patriarchy and Politics: A Comparative Evaluation of the Religious, Political and Social Thought of Sir Robert Filmer and Robert Lewis Dabney" (MA diss., Baylor University, 2006), 319.

[2] Despite prior studies of Hodge and Dabney, few substantively compared these men. In his biography of Dabney, Sean Lucas picks up on many of the same themes that this paper addresses. For example, Lucas does an excellent job analyzing Dabney's hatred of egalitarianism and the despisal of authority that Dabney connected to the French Revolution. Lucas connects these dots to show that Dabney's pro-slavery sentiments and his patriarchy were both rooted in a commitment to authority. Lucas talks about Hodge throughout his biography of Dabney, but primarily because he traces some of their interactions and explains some of their similarities and differences as professors. In other words, Hodge's views about slavery and patriarchy are not discussed and their views are not put into conversation with each other. More scholarship has focused on Hodge, much of which is succinctly conveyed in the 2002 collection of essays, John H. Stewart and James H. Moorhead, eds., *Charles Hodge Revisited: A Critical Appraisal of His Life and Work* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002). A couple of essays herein address Hodge's views on slavery and gender roles, although there is no consideration of how or if they were connected. Louise Stevenson's essay, "Charles Hodge, Womanly Women, and Manly Ministers" (pp. 159–80), is one of very few works, if not the only work, that considers Hodge's life and thought through a gendered lens.

[3] Sean M. Lucas, *Robert Lewis Dabney: A Southern Presbyterian Life* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2005), 79.

[4] Allen C. Guelzo, "Charles Hodge's Anti-Slavery Moment," in *Charles Hodge Revisited: A Critical Appraisal of His Life and Work*, ed. John H. Stewart and James H. Moorhead (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 303.

They both exemplify a common late-Antebellum approach to Scripture, which Mark Noll outlines in his classic *America's God: From Jonathan Edwards to Abraham Lincoln* (2002). As Noll argues, Protestantism was Americanized throughout the nineteenth century as American Protestants aligned it with republicanism and commonsense realism.[5] Many American Christians in this milieu equated their interpretations of Scripture with a commonsense reading of the text. This "republican-evangelical-commonsense synthesis" discouraged theologians from examining their cultural assumptions and their personal biases. Both Hodge and Dabney fell prey to these Americanized, hermeneutical impulses.

Hodge and Dabney equated their culturally informed readings of Scripture with its plain meaning, though Hodge's exegesis occasionally defied his cultural sensibilities. Dabney's interpretations rarely pushed against the patriarchal and racist hierarchies of southern society. Hodge, however, occasionally took unpopular positions amongst other northern Old School Presbyterians, like his belief in the validity of Roman Catholic baptisms. Similarly, even though Hodge personally supported Abraham Lincoln and the Union in the Civil War, he opposed his denomination's endorsement of the Union. Hodge argued that the Church must not bind the conscience of her members on civil matters. Despite being a product of his time, Hodge was a better expositor of Scripture because he was willing to carry his theological convictions to culturally and denominationally unpopular conclusions.[6] He had his finger on the societal and ecclesial pulse enough to know when a topic would threaten unity. When a topic portended division in his seminary, his denomination, or his nation, he broached it with the social awareness of a seasoned politician.[7]

Both men influenced Americans well beyond the bounds of Presbyterianism, especially Dabney, who took up the task of defending slavery and the Confederacy. Several of his writings about slavery and women were intended for average educated Americans like his books *Life and Campaigns of Lieut. Gen. Thomas J. Jackson (Stonewall Jackson)* (1866), *A Defense of Virginia (and Through Her of the South)* (1867), and *The Sensualistic Philosophy of the Nineteenth Century* (1875). Charles Irons observed that even with a small proportion of Presbyterians in the South, Presbyterian divines such as Robert Dabney and South Carolina's James Henley Thornwell played an inordinate role in defending the South's peculiar institution.[8] Alternatively, almost all of Hodge's books were religious in nature. While some works could be considered more than just theological, Hodge almost always addressed topics that he considered primarily theological. Aside from his work *What is Darwinism?* all of Hodge's books directly addressed theological issues. Hodge did however address many other religious adjacent topics in *The Biblical Repertory and Princeton Review*, most of whose readers were ministers or religious intellectuals.

Although Hodge and Dabney were Presbyterian, their approaches to slavery and gender roles were not unique to Presbyterianism. Their common commitment to a shared religious tradition and epistemology, however, reveals that such commonalities cannot be the source of their disagreements. Their ideas were at times profound and at other times egregiously errant, but their insights and errors are both instructive.

[5] Mark Noll, *America's God: From Jonathan Edwards to Abraham Lincoln* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 13.

[6] Noll, *America's God*, 419.

[7] Guelzo, "Charles Hodge's Anti-Slavery Moment," 303.

[8] Charles Irons, *The Origins of Proslavery Christianity: White and Black Evangelicals in the Colonial and Antebellum Virginia* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2008), 15–16.

1. "Pious Females"

Even though women constituted a majority in nearly every Presbyterian congregation, they were not mentioned in any of the official documents of the Presbyterian Church in the USA (PCUSA) for over two decades after the denomination's establishment in 1789.[9] Women were first mentioned during the 1811 General Assembly, which recognized the role that "pious females" had played in voluntary mission, benevolent, and reform organizations.[10] The term "pious females" often occurred in subsequent documents, revealing some of the ways revivalism offered Presbyterian women prominent roles. They primarily organized to address social and political concerns with a "woman's tenderness."[11] These organizations responded to urbanization, industrialization, immigration, and the growing need for more churches in the western United States, but they were often encouraged to do so in ways that were considered suitable for their sex.[12]

The early nineteenth century saw the rise and permeation of a "separate spheres" ideology of gender roles.[13] Throughout most of western history, the predominant view was that men and women were essentially the same sex, with the assumption that the latter was a biologically deformed and deficient version of the former. The Enlightenment, however, gave rise to the idea that women were wholly other in both their sexual nature and their fitness for certain types of labor.[14] This new understanding of the differences between the sexes, gave rise to new cultural practices and expectations for how men and women should function alongside each other in the family, the Church, and society. This new concept no longer saw women as inferior in every way, but as better equipped in certain regards, especially in the domestic sphere. Paradoxically, this "separate spheres" ideology led many to believe women were more pious, virtuous, and able to instill piety and virtue in their children. In the context of American history, Linda Kerber called this "republican motherhood"; its broad acceptance within a young nation allowed women the opportunity to pursue education, while still relegating them to the home to instill their intelligence and values in their children, particularly the boys who would one day vote or run for office. Furthermore, the "separate spheres" ideology afforded many women the opportunity to form organizations that, they argued, needed particularly female solutions.[15]

Antebellum Presbyterians, like Americans more broadly, employed language that signaled this shift. For example, in 1811 Albany minister Matthew La Rue Perrine argued that women "ought to ascertain and discharge those duties which are suited to their natures and conditions, and which are the

[9] Lois Boyd and R. Douglas Brackenridge, *Presbyterian Women in America: Two Centuries of a Quest for Status* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1996), 3.

[10] Boyd and Brackenridge, *Presbyterian Women in America,* 3.

[11] . M. Wherry, ed., *Woman in Missions: Papers and Addresses Presented at the Woman's Congress Missions, October 2–4, 1893, in the Hall of Columbus, Chicago* (New York: American Tract Society, 1893), 90; cited in Boyd and Brackenridge, *Presbyterian Women in America,* 4.

[12] Boyd and Brackenridge, *Presbyterian Women in America*, 5.

[13] While the one-sex model and the "separate spheres" concept are different understandings of how the sexes relate to each other, each gave rise to cultural practices and expectations that accord with these understandings of the nature of sex difference. By gender or gender roles, I am referring to these cultural practices and expectations that are anchored in biological sex.

[14] Thomas Laqueur, *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), viii, 3.

[15] Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household: Black and White Women of the Old South* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1988), 335.

glory of their sex."[16] These encouragements and admonitions remained consistent within the PCUSA in the years leading up to the denomination's split in 1837–1838. By 1832, the General Assembly was a bit more explicit in their warnings, but the same spirit remained: "Meetings of pious women by themselves, for conversation and prayer, whenever they can conveniently be held, we entirely approve. But let not the inspired prohibitions of [Paul] be violated. To teach and exhort, or to lead in prayer, in public and promiscuous assemblies, is clearly forbidden to women in the Holy Oracles."[17] After the schism of 1837–1838, members of both the Old and New School had to walk a fine line on controversial issues, most notably slavery.

When the Presbyterian Church split in 1837–1838, both sides were patriarchal. New School Presbyterians supported revivals much more than their Old School brethren, and revivalists pushed the bounds of decorum in many ways, such as women praying in public.[18] New Schoolers were not trying to destabilize a "separate spheres" ideology, but they generally demarcated the boundaries of such spheres more liberally than Old Schoolers. Nearly every minister in both the Old School and the New School accepted a "separate spheres" view, but geographical differences often intermingled with the "separate spheres" concept to produce markedly different concoctions. Since Robert Dabney and Charles Hodge represent different regional and cultural assumptions, Dabney and Hodge each constructed their beliefs in accordance with a "separate spheres" ideology, but the differences between their views highlight their cultural distinctives.

2. Slavery and Schism

Despite the common myth that Old School Presbyterianism was predominantly southern, southerners made up only a third of the Old School.[19] Similarly, even though most southern Presbyterians stayed in the Old School after the schism of 1837–1838, ten thousand southern Presbyterians sided with the New School.[20] Even though Old School Presbyterians were more accepting of pro-slavery advocates and New School Presbyterians were more accepting of abolitionists, both hoped to avoid further fragmentation.

Throughout the 1820s and 1830s, most PCUSA ministers supported efforts to free enslaved people gradually and colonize them elsewhere, usually Liberia. Some of the most influential men in the Old School were strong supporters of colonization. At the time of the 1837–1838 split, many Presbyterians still remembered when Samuel Hopkins, Jonathan Edwards's star pupil, initially suggested colonization back in 1776.[21] The PCUSA General Assembly was the first ecclesiastical body to endorse the colonization

[16] Matthew La Rue Perrine, *Women Have a Work to Do in the House of God: A Discourse Delivered at the First Annual Meeting of the Female Missionary Society for the Poor of the City of New-York and Its Vicinity* (New York: Thomson, 1817), 8.

[17] *Minutes of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America. From A.D. 1821 to A.D. 1835, Inclusive* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication), 378–79, https://tinyurl.com/4ek32khs.

[18] Boyd and Brackenridge, *Presbyterian Women in America*, 93.

[19] Peter Wallace, "'The Bond of Union': The Old School Presbyterian Church and the American Nation, 1837–1861," 3 vols. (PhD diss., University of Notre Dame, 2004), 1:28.

[20] Wallace, "The Bond of Union," 1:102.

[21] George Marsden, *The Evangelical Mind and the New School Presbyterian Experience: A Case Study of Thought and Theology in Nineteenth-Century America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970), 92.

movement in 1818.[22] By the end of the 1830s, most colonization advocates were forced to face the many logistical problems that lay behind their efforts. The failure of colonization as a viable option gave rise to a stronger and more radical abolitionism.

Political and theological strife resulted in polarization generally along sectional lines. The Methodist and the Baptist denominations split in 1844 and 1845, respectively, over the subject of slavery. Whereas in 1818 the Presbyterian General Assembly had condemned slavery calling it "a gross violation of the most precious and sacred rights of human nature; as utterly inconsistent with the law of God … [and] the spirit and principles of the gospel of Christ," in the 1840s both the Old and New School struggled to be bold yet not so bold as to rend asunder their denominations.[23] In 1845, the Old School General Assembly concluded that the Church could "not legislate where Christ had not legislated, not make terms of membership which he has not made…. [The] Assembly [could] not, therefore, denounce the holding of slaves as necessarily a heinous and scandalous sin."[24] Thus, Old School Presbyterians chose to prioritize ecclesiastical unity. Almost two decades later, in 1861, southern Old Schoolers left the PCUSA in opposition to the Gardiner Spring resolution which required them to support the Union in the Civil War. They quickly reorganized and rebranded themselves the Presbyterian Church in the Confederate States of America (PCCSA).[25]

The PCCSA, particularly under the influence of Robert Dabney, cultivated a distinctively southern Presbyterianism. Throughout his life, Dabney's own personal identification with the South and the Reformed tradition influenced his political theology. Before the war, Dabney strongly defended southern slavery as a part of the patriarchal order of "Bible Republicanism."[26] Indeed, Dabney's defense of slavery reveals one of the strange ironies of Presbyterianism and pro-slavery argumentation: even though Presbyterianism was far more common in the North, most of slavery's ablest defenders were southern Old School Presbyterians. Because a few southern Presbyterians articulated the most robust defenses of slavery, their views are often taken as representative of the more predominant pro-slavery positions of Baptists and Methodists.[27]

3. Robert Dabney

Robert Dabney was born in Louisa County, Virginia, in 1820. He strongly identified with Virginia, the South, and Scottish Presbyterianism, despite the fact that he was the descendent of French Huguenots.[28] Dabney studied at Hampton Sidney College before attending the University of Virginia

[22] Marsden, *The Evangelical Mind and the New School Presbyterian Experience,* 92.

[23] *Minutes of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America from Its Organization A.D. 1789 to A.D. 1820 Inclusive* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1847), 692, https://archive.org/details/minutesofgeneral01phil/mode/2up.

[24] *Minutes of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America, From A.D. 1838 to A.D. 1847 Inclusive* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publications, 1887), 378–88, https://tinyurl.com/y63cjf9r.

[25] Nathan P. Feldmeth, S. Donald Fortson III, Garth M. Rosell, Kenneth J. Stewart, *Reformed and Evangelical across Four Centuries: The Presbyterian Story in America* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2022), 175; Wallace, "The Bond of Union," 2:647–48.

[26] Robert Dabney, *Systematic Theology*, 2nd ed. (Richmond, VA: Union Theological Seminary, 1878), 1023–24, https://tinyurl.com/y87rxn7h.

[27] Irons, *The Origins of Proslavery Christianity,* 15–16.

[28] Lucas, *Robert Lewis Dabney,* 23; Wallace, "The Bond of Union," 1:20.

for his Master of Arts and subsequently studying at Union Theological Seminary in Virginia. After attending seminary, Dabney pastored two Presbyterian churches, one in Louisa County for only a year and another in Augusta County, Virginia for six years. Dabney believed in the virtues of farming, and he was involved in agriculture both as a child and throughout his adult life. His connections to agriculture made him personally familiar with and reliant on slavery. While pastoring in Augusta County, Dabney married Margaret Lavinia Morrison. In 1853, Dabney was offered a faculty position at Virginia's Union Theological Seminary, where he taught Ecclesiastical History and Polity and then Systematic and Polemic Theology for most of his adult life. [29]

Robert Dabney was a native Virginian who stood in what has been dubbed the "southern tradition." This tradition accepted and defended the idea that civilization necessitates a religiously established society with what Sean Lucas called, "sanctified social distinctions," such as class, sex, and race.[30] Furthermore, this tradition entailed a belief in Jeffersonian agrarianism, limited republicanism, an opposition to an individualism that rejected civic responsibility, and a defense of chivalry and gentility.[31] Dabney's greatest legacy has been his ideological fusion between Old School Presbyterianism and the "southern tradition," which shaped the worldviews of his contemporaries and southern Presbyterianism in his wake.[32]

Like many nineteenth-century Americans, Dabney adhered to Scottish commonsense realism.[33] Ironically, Dabney's commonsense philosophy did not stop him from seeing a deeper concern behind nearly every argument; however, his commonsense philosophy was wed to assumptions he often overlooked or simply left unexamined. Dabney employed commonsense philosophy in his attempts to combat what he called "sensualistic philosophy." By "sensualistic philosophy," Dabney was primarily targeting positivism, an epistemology that argues knowledge cannot be attained through religion, intuition, or commonsense, but instead through sensory experience and testable propositions. Positivism led to an almost limitless confidence in science, propelling the rise of naturalism and the decline of supernaturalism in the latter half of the nineteenth century. Dabney described positivism when he wrote, "[It] is that theory, which resolves all the powers of the human spirit into the functions of the five senses, and modifications thereof."[34] He blamed positivism for what he considered nineteenth-century society's deepest flaws, such as egalitarianism, abolitionism, feminism, the centralization of government, northern Capitalism, and public education.[35] Dabney was convinced that he maintained a biblical worldview in his fight with the "sensualistic philosophy," but Dabney's worldview was deeply enmeshed within his own context.

Dabney was raised in a slaveholding, patriarchal family. In 1903, his first biographer Thomas Carey Johnson explained that Dabney enjoyed the educational, cultural, and leisurely pursuits that slaveholding afforded him as a boy. According to Dabney, hierarchy was both natural and integral to society. Against modernism's prioritization of the individual, Dabney upheld the Christian household. In his view, there

[29] Davenport, "Patriarchy and Politics," 315–17.

[30] Lucas, *Robert Lewis Dabney,* 25.

[31] Lucas, *Robert Lewis Dabney,* 25; Eugene Genovese, *The Southern Tradition: The Achievement and Limitations of American Conservatism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994), 14.

[32] Lucas, *Robert Lewis Dabney,* 25.

[33] In brief, commonsense philosophy is an epistemological approach that claims humans can take the existence and processes of the world essentially at face value.

[34] Robert Dabney, *The Sensualistic Philosophy of the Nineteenth Century* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1876), 1.

[35] Lucas, *Robert Lewis Dabney,* 166.

was little difference between the words slave, subject, and subordinate. A master was to be "the chief magistrate of the little integral commonwealth" while the wife, children, and slaves were considered "his State… under the master's tutelage."[36]

Dabney's thought can be challenging to parse out because he connected nearly every concept to another, which cultivated an all or nothing mentality. He usually portrayed the options as his view or "sheer infidelity" by logical consequence.[37] Often, Dabney failed to connect all the dots in his slippery slope arguments, which revealed his reliance on commonsense realism all the more. This is evident in Dabney's 1871 article against women's rights, when he concluded, "We must then make up our minds in accepting Women's Rights to surrender our Bibles, and have an atheistic Government."[38] For Dabney, abolitionism and women's suffrage were detrimental to a biblical worldview, when they were actually just a threat to his "southern tradition." In the same article, Dabney made a telling connection, writing, "No words are needed to show hence that should either the voice of God or of sound experience require woman to be placed for the good of the whole society in a subordinate sphere, there can be no natural injustice in doing so. But these old truths, with their sound and beneficent applications, have been scornfully, repudiated by Abolitionism and Radicalism."[39] This one comment encapsulates all of these complex elements in Dabney's thought. His commonsense philosophy undergirds his sentiment that little explanation is necessary for why women are relegated to a separate sphere. His language makes it clear that he embraced a "separate spheres" ideology and that he did not see this framing as a cultural development, calling them "old truths."[40] Then, perhaps most tellingly, Dabney said that it was these truths that "Abolitionism and Radicalism" opposed. Previously in the article, Dabney had already praised the "southern tradition," but here he connected a slave's unwillingness to submit and a wife's unwillingness to submit. He blamed individualism, but specifically the capitalistic, individualism of the North. Dabney connected the Confederate defense of slavery in the Civil War with an ongoing battle against positivism, individualism, and feminism after the war.

For Dabney, all household relations must be measured by their submission to the master, which is why he was even comfortable calling wives and children types of slaves. Indeed, in his 1878 *Systematic Theology*, Dabney marveled at the extent of parental authority, writing, "[I]t authorizes the parent to govern the child for a fourth of his life as a slave… seeming almost to infringe the inalienable responsibilities and liberties of the immortal soul!"[41] He always tried to cushion the blow by reiterating that a husband, master, and father ought to be benevolent. He praised an idealized benevolent form of slavery over against the poor working conditions of factory workers in the North, and he similarly argued that once women entered politics and the workforce, the result would be " the re-enslavement of women, not under the Scriptural bonds of marriage, but under the yoke of literal corporeal force."[42]

[36] Robert Dabney, *A Defence of Virginia and Through Her, of the South, in Recent and Pending Contests Against the Sectional Party* (New York: Hale & Sons, 1867), 229, https://www.gutenberg.org/files/47422/47422-h/47422-h.htm.

[37] Robert Dabney, "Women's Rights Women," *The Southern Magazine* (March 1871): 329.

[38] Dabney, "Women's Rights Women," 330.

[39] Dabney, "Women's Rights Women," 327.

[40] Dabney, "Women's Rights Women," 327.

[41] Dabney, *Systematic Theology*, 918.

[42] Matt Jantzen, "Confederate Theology: Robert Lewis Dabney and the Theological Afterlife of Slavery," *Modern Theology* 39.4 (2023): 751–74, 762; Dabney, "Women's Rights Women," 332.

Once again, his defense of slavery and patriarchy were anchored in his "southern tradition" and in direct opposition to northern industrial capitalism.

Dabney's understanding of gender roles is explicated in detail in his 1879 article "The Public Preaching of Women." He argued that woman was originally created as "a helpmeet for the man," but "God, from the beginning of man's existence as a sinner, put the wife under the kindly authority of the husband, making him the head and her the subordinate in domestic society."[43] Dabney then directly cited Eve's curse in the Garden of Eden: "thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee" " (Gen 3:16 KJV).[44] Whereas modern complementarians and egalitarians would understand this curse as a tragic consequence of sin, Dabney interpreted it more so as a template to follow. Dabney went on to argue, against nearly all modern interpretations, that this "sentence on the first woman has been extended, by imputation, to all her daughters."[45] Then, without transition, Dabney jumped from the relation of wives to husbands to the relation of women to men in the Church, contending, "These are the grounds on which the apostle says the Lord enacted that in the church assemblies the woman shall be pupil and not public teacher, ruled and not ruler."[46] He wrapped up these interpretations by applying it to his context. He dichotomized "the radical theories of individual human rights and equality now in vogue" and the immovable structures of hierarchy. He attempted to silence any objections by concluding, "But this is inspired!… 'He that replieth against God, let him answer it.'"[47] This argument was much more informed by Dabney's cultural context than he led on.

While Dabney upheld this hierarchical model as the very "theory of the Bible," he was articulating prevalent cultural assumptions.[48] Beneath Dabney's patriarchy was a clear belief in a "separate spheres" ideology. "The female child," he observed, "is born with a different set of rights in part, from the male child of the same parents; because born to different native capacities and natural relations and duties."[49] He often spoke of the woman's sphere as the home, and he argued this was a biblical assignment and in no way cultural.[50] He admitted that both men and women have a "natural superiority" in their respective

[43] Robert Dabney, "The Public Preaching of Women," *The Southern Presbyterian Review* 30.4 (1879): 700.

[44] Dabney, "The Public Preaching of Women," 700.

[45] "Dabney, "The Public Preaching of Women," 700. This is a striking argument for numerous reasons. Modern debates between complementarians and egalitarians revolve around when roles were given to Adam and Eve and for what purposes. Complementarians tend to argue that Adam's authoritative role and Eve's submissive role predate the Fall, whereas egalitarians tend to argue that these roles were lamentable consequences of the Fall itself. Complementarians often argue that there will be tension and strife within marital relations, but that does not do away with the roles of husbands and wives entirely. Dabney, ever the stringent patriarchalist, attempted to have it both ways. He argued that woman was made for man, and thus each had a distinct role before the Fall, but he also argued that the Fall made the woman's role even more subservient. The former aligns with modern complementarianism and the latter aligns with modern egalitarianism. Dabney would strongly disagree with the egalitarian argument that Jesus reversed the curse and restored women to a pre-Fall status of equality. He argued that Eve's sin was imputed to her subsequent daughters. Modern complementarians and egalitarians agree that the curse described in Genesis 3:16 is a terrible post-Fall reality, but they disagree about what exactly it is describing. Dabney, however, contended that the curse should be enforced by sequent generations of men. The same logic would oppose epidurals, for example, as ways of getting around the curse. It is dangerously close to seeing the Fall's curses as positive goods.

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[47] Dabney, "The Public Preaching of Women," 700.

[48] Dabney, *A Defence of Virginia*, 229.

[49] Dabney, *Systematic Theology*, 1023.

[50] Dabney, "The Public Preaching of Women," 700.

spheres, but, in his writings, women's superiorities all pertain to motherhood and childrearing. Dabney anticipated the complication that unmarried women might pose to his supposedly biblical model, since his model left women without a practical femininity outside of marriage. "God contemplates marriage as the proper condition of woman," he writes, "while he does not make celibacy a crime; and that the sphere he assigns to the unmarried woman is also private and domestic."[51] In short, he doubled down and considered this one sentence a sufficient treatment.

Dabney's unexamined cultural assumptions led him to conclusions foreign to the biblical text itself. This is perhaps most telling in the sharp difference between Dabney's defense of slavery and his defense of racism. Whereas Dabney articulated one of the most robust defenses of southern slavery, his racism and opposition to integration lacked nearly any pretense to biblical warrant. Eugene Genovese poignantly commented, "Nothing is more disheartening than to see such firmly orthodox Christians as Dabney, who stood all his life on *sola scriptura* and turned to the Bible for guidance on every subject, plunge into arguments from sheer prejudice that hardly pretended to be scripturally grounded."[52] What made Dabney's pro-slavery argument successful was his consistent effort to portray the options as either slavery or infidelity.[53] Here again emerges Dabney's strategy of dichotomizing between his view and infidelity. Dabney knew, however, that this framing would only succeed if southerners were willing to make southern slavery into what he considered a biblically justified version. Genovese called this approach pro-slavery ameliorationism, because the goal was not simply to preserve slavery, but to reform it.[54]

If implemented, Dabney's pro-slavery ameliorationism would have offered many enslaved blacks a tradeoff, not unlike the benefits and less severe drawbacks that "republican motherhood" presented for white women. "Republican motherhood" afforded women the opportunity to receive higher levels of education and greater opportunities to pursue distinctively female tasks inside and outside of the home. Had Dabney's approach been legally enacted, enslaved populations would have had to make a similar assessment with even less flexibility: in an improved yet still enslaved situation, should the enslaved accept these improvements and continue submitting to their white masters? Thankfully, American chattel slavery ended in 1865 and no such calculation was forced upon enslaved peoples.

Dabney's view of the household centered around and elevated the master, exalting him as a stern but genteel father figure. In Dabney's so-called "biblical slavery," paternalism inspired language that connected fathers with masters and slaves with children. Dabney's view maintained a correlation between enslaved people and children, crippling the Apostle Paul's admonition to Philemon that he accept back Onesimus, "not now as a servant, but above a servant, a brother beloved" (Phlm 16 KJV). Dabney wrote off the "not now" in this verse almost entirely, writing, "the obvious sense of these words is, that Philemon should now receive Onesimus back, not as a slave only, but as both a slave and Christian

[51] Dabney, "The Public Preaching of Women," 700.

[52] Eugene Genovese, *A Consuming Fire: The Fall of the Confederacy in the Mind of the White Christian South* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1998), 95.

[53] Molly Oshatz, *Slavery and Sin: The Fight Against Slavery and the Rise of Liberal Protestantism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 46.

[54] Oshatz, *Slavery and Sin,* 46, 69; Genovese, *A Consuming Fire*, 95. For Dabney's pro-slavery strategy to work, African Americans could not be legally disciplined more harshly than whites who had committed the same crimes; their marriages had to be honored and spouses could not be separated; black women could not be sexually violated; and enslaved people had to be instructed in the Christian faith and taught how to read the Bible.

brother."[55] For Dabney, brotherhood in no way eschewed perpetual enslavement nor the perpetual status of child for the enslaved.

4. Charles Hodge

The Princeton theologian Charles Hodge is a helpful comparison to Dabney for many reasons. Hodge was both conservative and moderate. While defiantly orthodox in his confessional Presbyterianism, he was strikingly nuanced in the ways he applied Scripture to political and social dilemmas. One of the chief reasons Hodge was so nuanced was because he prioritized unity. Since slavery threatened to divide his seminary, his denomination, and his country, his writings on the topic may seem overly nuanced to those who do not share his ultimate concern for unity.[56] Especially when it came to slavery, Hodge wrote with a politician's awareness of how his words would be read by different audiences. Hodge, like Dabney, believed and espoused commonsense realism, he took the "separate spheres" view as a given, and he was a theological titan within the Old School. One of the strongest similarities between Hodge and Dabney was the role the Westminster Confession of Faith played in their thought. They both imbibed commonsense and a "separate spheres" ideology, but they were also both deeply committed to the Westminster Standards.[57]

Charles Hodge was born in 1797 in Philadelphia to Presbyterian parents of northern Irish decent.[58] Like his father and his older brother, Hodge attended Princeton College, graduating in 1815.[59] The following year, Hodge began his studies at Princeton Seminary. As Hodge's graduation neared, the seminary's president and Hodge's personal mentor, Archibald Alexander, offered Hodge a professorship. He originally taught biblical Hebrew, but throughout his tenure at Princeton he spent most of his time teaching biblical literature.[60] Aside from a two-year stint when Hodge studied in Europe, he taught at Princeton Seminary until his death in 1878.

Hodge was a systematic theologian, but he specialized in the Pauline epistles. Between 1835 and 1857, Hodge authored commentaries on Romans, both Corinthian epistles, and Ephesians. His belief in commonsense realism, the "separate spheres," and biblical infallibility gave rise to patriarchal interpretations common in his day, but they also gave rise to surprising conclusions. For example, Hodge supported female education and even female writings and publications, but only in fields that in no way threatened male headship.[61] Louise L. Stevenson pointed out that biblical literalism actually drove Princeton Seminary to allow more female writings and publications.[62] According to Hodge, the Bible only barred women from public speaking "especially in the church," but it made no such prohibitions

[55] Dabney, *A Defence of Virginia*, 184.

[56] Guelzo, "Charles Hodge's Anti-Slavery Moment," 306.

[57] Lucas, *Robert Lewis Dabney,* 19, 86, and 150.

[58] W. Andrew Hoffecker, *Charles Hodge: The Pride of Princeton* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2011), 28–29.

[59] Paul Gutjahr, *Charles Hodge: Guardian of American Orthodoxy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 31.

[60] Gutjahr, *Charles Hodge,* 72–74.

[61] Stevenson, "Charles Hodge, Womanly Women, and Manly Ministers," 163.

[62] Stevenson, "Charles Hodge, Womanly Women, and Manly Ministers," 168.

against women writing.[63] Hodge went even further in his commentary on 1 Corinthians to acknowledge Paul's acceptance of female prophetesses, commenting, "It is therefore only the public exercise of the gift that is prohibited."[64] Hodge used many of the same tools as Dabney when expositing Scripture. They each came to the conclusion that women were superior to men in ways that are in keeping with "the refinement and delicacy of their sex."[65] Nonetheless, Hodge's "commonsense" reading of the text expanded the female sphere in ways Dabney's "southern tradition" could not countenance.

Hodge's exposition of the household code in his 1857 commentary on Ephesians is particularly insightful. It reveals in brief his thoughts on authority, women, marriage, slavery, and how they related. The household code in Ephesians begins in chapter five, verse twenty-one … or does it? In the twenty-first century, commentators still debate whether Ephesians 5:21 should be considered the end of a preceding section or the beginning of the following. The verse simply reads, "Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God" (Eph 5:21 KJV). Modern evangelicals generally argue that if this verse is considered part of the household code, it is at minimum saying that wives and husbands are to submit to each other, and perhaps that parents and children, and masters and slaves should do the same. Some conservative evangelicals have argued that the verse should be grouped with the preceding section and that it is unrelated to the subsequent household code.[66] Long before these current debates, Hodge argued that verse twenty-one should be considered the beginning of the household code. Perhaps even more surprising, Hodge interpreted the verse to mean that all Christians, regardless of social relation, should be predisposed to submission and obedience. "From the general obligation to obedience," Hodge wrote, "follows the special obligation of wives, children, and servants."[67] Even though Hodge contended for "womanly women, and manly ministers," he argued that all Christians are relegated to a state of

[63] Charles Hodge, *An Exposition of the First Epistle to the Corinthians* (New York: Carter & Brothers, 1860), 304–5, https://archive.org/details/epistlecorinthians00hodgrich/page/n333/mode/2up.

[64] Hodge, *An Exposition of the First Epistle to the Corinthians,* 305.

[65] Hodge, *An Exposition of the First Epistle to the Corinthians,* 305.

[66] Egalitarians and complementarians fall on both sides of this debate, so the sectional categorization of Ephesians 5:21 is not a defeater for either view. For more on the scholarly debate surrounding the placement of Ephesians 5:21, see Frank Thielman, *Ephesians,* Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010), 365–376. Thielman articulates a nuanced view akin to that of Charles Hodge. He argues that grammatically the verse serves as both the concluding line of the previous section and the initiatory line of the household code. Tielman writes, "The phrase 'submitting to one another in the fear of Christ,' then, functions at the same time as a transition from the previous section on corporate worship to the new section on submission as a heading over the new section indicating its primary concern—submission to one another in the household." (365) Thielman also describes the scholarly debate when he observes, "Some commentators (e.g., Best 1998: 515–16) attach this verse to the previous section, and the grammatical structure of the passage certainly supports this view. Ὑποτασσόμενοι (hypotassomenoi, submitting) is one of a string of five participles in 5:19– 21 that qualify πληροῦσθε (plērousthe, be filled), and so at one level it makes sense to see 'submitting to one another' as a description of yet another result of being filled in the sphere of the Spirit: those who are filled in the Spirit not only speak, sing, make melody, and give thanks in corporate worship; they also submit to one another in the fear of Christ. The theme of submission, however, dominates the household code that follows, reappearing not only where the term ὑποτάσσω (hypotassō, submit) itself is implied (5:22) or used (5:24), but also where the concepts of fear (5:33; 6:5), honor (6:2), and obedience (6:1, 5) show up. The grammatical attachment of the participle to the previous section eases the transition to the new section, but the substance of the verse, with its focus on submission, means that it is best taken with what follows and should be understood as an introduction to it (cf. Dawes 1998: 18– 21)." Thielman, *Ephesians,* 365, 372.

[67] Charles Hodge, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Ephesians* (New York: Carter & Brothers, 1860), 5:21, https://www.monergism.com/thethreshold/sdg/charleshodge/hodge_ephesians.html.

constant dependency and mutual submission, two dispositions widely associated with femininity in the nineteenth century.[68] Hodge argued, however, that the general duty of mutual submission does not preclude other specific types of submission.[69]

Hodge's "separate spheres" ideology comes into focus in his exposition of verse 23, which reads, "For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body" (Eph 5:23 KJV). Hodge forthrightly stated that men and women are naturally superior to each other in complementary ways. He claimed that men are "larger, stronger, bolder," and they have "more of those mental and moral qualities which are required in a leader."[70] Furthermore, even though he provided biblical arguments for male headship, his commonsense realism is particularly apparent in light of the limited evidence he provided after employing such broad language; he commented, "This is just as plain from history as that iron is heavier than water."[71] Hodge contended that this male superiority was in no way challenged by "the mutual dependence of the sexes" but rather bolstered by it because of the "inferiority of men to women in other qualities than those which entitle to authority."[72] Hodge did not address these superior female qualities in his Ephesians commentary, though he did address them on other occasions. In his exposition of Ephesians 5, Hodge seems most concerned with proving that the creation order (man first and woman second as a helper for man) still carries weight for how husbands and wives ought to interact. Whereas an older one-sex model portrayed women as less capable than men in every way, this two-sex paradigm still maintained male authority, but it recognized and even encouraged female superiority in areas that were considered distinctly feminine.

Hodge struggled to apply this approach in 1849 when his daughter was about to have her first child. Hodge's daughter, Mary, was living in Danville, Kentucky with her husband. Mary explained to her mother Sarah that she was unable to find hired help since Kentucky was a slave state, so she would have to give birth without aid. Sarah immediately made plans to travel to Kentucky to help her daughter, but Charles was concerned about Sarah's safety. The great cholera epidemic was afflicting many throughout Mississippi and no one knew where it might spread next. Charles was terrified that he might lose his wife, and even Mary implored her mother not to come, especially if it was against the wishes of her father.[73] Nonetheless, Sarah resolved to help her daughter and, despite his frustrations, Charles did not stop her. Not only did Sarah leave, but she took her sons along with her. It is almost certain that if Sarah had not been there, Mary and the child would have died. After giving birth, Mary developed puerperal fever and an abscess on her breast. Sarah cared for Mary during her illness, having to relocate her and the child to Lexington and eventually Princeton in order to avoid the influx of cholera cases.[74] After the matter, Charles Hodge reflected upon the event and wondered whether Sarah's responsibility to love her daughter or her responsibility to submit to her husband should have taken precedence. While Sarah was gone, Charles wrote her, praising his wife for following "the 'instinctive judgment,' the gift of your sex,

[68] Hodge, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Ephesians,* 5:21; Stevenson, "Charles Hodge, Womanly Women, and Manly Ministers," 159.

[69] Hodge, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Ephesians,* 5:22.

[70] Hodge, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Ephesians,* 5:23.

[71] Hodge, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Ephesians,* 5:23.

[72] Hodge, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Ephesians,* 5:23.

[73] Stevenson, "Charles Hodge, Womanly Women, and Manly Ministers," 172.

[74] Stevenson, "Charles Hodge, Womanly Women, and Manly Ministers," 173.

rather than the advice that the wisdom of men dictated."[75] Even in these dire times, Hodge's "separate spheres" ideology shown through, and he praised his wife's superior maternal judgment.

This story highlights the extent to which context shapes, affirms, and forces us to question our beliefs. Charles Hodge cared about the health, unity, and endurance of institutions. He cared about the survival of his seminary, his denomination, his nation. For much of Hodge's antebellum tenure at Princeton Seminary, approximately 20–25% of the student body was southern.[76] Even beyond southern presence at the seminary, slavery legally persisted and was gradually abolished in New Jersey throughout almost the entirety of Hodge's life.[77] Also, he and his denomination remained committed to a stance of inaction on the question of slavery. Like other Old Schoolers, Hodge feared facing the possibility of a split akin to those that transpired in the Baptist and Methodist Churches in the mid-1840s. Aside from his personal temperament, Hodge was also a Whig and, later in life, a Republican. He admired the political maneuvers of men like Henry Clay and Abraham Lincoln who successfully kept unity in times of crisis. Hodge's treatment of slavery must be understood as an attempt to, on the one hand, tackle the issue as he understood it, while, on the other hand, approach it in a way that only offended those who supported division. As Allen Guelzo concisely observed, "Division was Hodge's great dread."[78]

Hodge's exposition of the household code in Ephesians not only sheds light on his view of marriage but also his view of slavery. His exposition of Ephesians 6:5–9 conveys both his insights and assumptions. Hodge paved a moderate path, condemning both radical abolitionists who considered slaveholding inherently sinful as well as pro-slavery advocates who wanted to perpetuate the institution or who considered it desirable.[79] Still, Hodge was more aggressive in his denunciations of abolitionism, which he considered a threat to unity. Unlike Dabney, Hodge believed any effort to reform slavery should simply be a positive step towards emancipation, but not an end in itself. As a point of commonality between Hodge and Dabney, both argued that to classify enslaved people as property would be unbiblical and dehumanizing.[80] Notably, Hodge and Dabney both acknowledged that a subordinate must ultimately submit to God, which meant that a Christian should defy any command to break God's law and any directive that prevented him from keeping it. Dabney understood this to mean that slave laws needed to be improved to prevent masters from forcing enslaved people into sin.[81] The black Presbyterian minister Henry Highland Garnett used strikingly similar logic to argue that enslaved Christians had a duty to defy any and all masters who prevented them from keeping the Sabbath and reading the Bible, which constituted the vast majority between the Nat Turner rebellion (1831) and the onset of the Civil War (1861).[82] Charles Hodge's ultimate aim was slavery's demise, but his approach granted credence to

[75] Stevenson, "Charles Hodge, Womanly Women, and Manly Ministers," 173.

[76] Guelzo, "Charles Hodge's Anti-Slavery Moment," 303.

[77] Guelzo, "Charles Hodge's Anti-Slavery Moment," 302.

[78] Guelzo, "Charles Hodge's Anti-Slavery Moment," 306.

[79] Hodge, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Ephesians,* 6:5.

[80] This was a key pillar in the strongest pro-slavery arguments, and both Robert Dabney and James Henley Thornwell noted this distinction. They claimed that masters only had a right to the labor of the enslaved, not their personhood.

[81] Oshatz, *Slavery and Sin*, 69.

[82] Henry Highland Garnett, "An Address to the Slaves of the United States of America," in *Negro Orators and Their Orations,* ed. Carter G. Woodson (New York: Russell & Russell, 1969), 153; cited in Oshatz, *Slavery and Sin*, 71.

certain pro-slavery arguments; this is partially why many abolitionists inaccurately considered Hodge pro-slavery.[83]

Hodge also demarcated his view from pro-slavery divines such as Dabney and Thornwell when he argued that Christians must not cherish slavery. For Hodge, slavery was a tragic reality that Christians should peacefully, legally, and gradually bring to an end. Whereas Dabney pushed for a "biblical slavery," Hodge argued that all forms of slavery are founded upon "the inferiority of one class of society to another" and any effort to perpetuate slavery necessitated the perpetuation of that inferiority, "preventing the improvement of the subject class."[84] Of course, Dabney did not want African Americans to improve beyond his designated bounds, as his post-war life evidenced.

Whereas for Hodge the goal was to recognize the enslaved as brothers and sisters and thus raise them above their station, for Dabney the goal was to care for the enslaved as children and keep them "under the master's tutelage."[85] Alternatively, Charles Hodge followed his logic to a surprising conclusion as early as 1836 when he wrote:

> It may be objected that if the slaves are allowed so to improve as to become freemen, the next step in their progress is that they should become citizens. We admit that it is so… This objection would not be considered of any force, if the slaves in this country were not of a different race from their masters. Still they are men; their colour does not place them beyond the operation of the principles of the gospel, or from under the protection of God.[86]

Hodge's argument seems uncharacteristically naïve yet also remarkably insightful. Some abolitionists criticized Hodge's view as impractical, as if shackles were "gradually to relax, until they f[e] ll off entirely."[87] Indeed, Hodge's view was hands off. He believed that gospel logic would work through slave societies and gradually bring the institution to an end, given that individual Christians do their part in following the household codes. Despite this naïve assumption, Hodge openly acknowledged that many southerners were defiantly opposed to improving the lives of enslaved individuals because of their race. He supported the end result of black citizenship, something Dabney could never bring himself to do.

Furthermore, in his commentary on Ephesians, Hodge observed that as long as slavery endured, the temptation to view enslaved people as less than equal in worth and dignity would also endure, fester, and spread.[88] This proved to be a particularly insightful observation, as historians have observed the many ways enslavement cultivated modern concepts of race and perpetuated racism. While Hodge briefly touched on the unique danger of American slavery because of its racial basis it in 1836, he rarely gave it the attention that it deserved. As the nineteenth-century Church historian Philip Schaff perceptively commented, "Of all forms of slavery the American is the most difficult to dispose of, because it is not

[83] Genovese, *A Consuming Fire,* 88.
[84] Hodge, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Ephesians,* 6:5.
[85] Dabney, *A Defence of Virginia*, 229.
[86] Charles Hodge, "Slavery," *The Biblical Repertory* 8.2 (1836): 304–5.
[87] Guelzo, "Charles Hodge's Anti-Slavery Moment," 315.
[88] Hodge, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Ephesians,* 6:5.

only a question of domestic institution and political economy, but of race. The negro question lies far deeper than the slavery question."[89]

Using language that might appear strange in light of modern usage, Hodge argued that masters have a responsibility to treat their slaves with "justice and equity."[90] He distinguished equality of roles or stations with equal rights as human beings. Hodge argued for a gradual emancipationism that began with Christian masters treating slaves with worth and dignity. For Hodge, this did not necessitate immediate abolition, but he argued it could not mean slavery's perpetuity.

One can and should criticize Hodge's view as naively optimistic, but his view was much more pragmatic and socially aware than is often realized. As Allen Guelzo pointed out, once it became clear that the Confederacy would fight to preserve slavery until the bitter end, Hodge dropped his prior nuances and approved a PCUSA statement in 1864 that labeled slavery "an evil and guilt… that concrete system… designed and adapted to keep a certain class of our fellow-men in a state of degradation."[91] Dabney bristled at this PCUSA opinion nearly a decade after it was published, opining:

> Any man or any church who says [slavery] is sin takes some other rule of faith, and is so far infidel. The Old School Church was not willing to say anything like this before the war. But the war separated her from the South, and also fired her heart with hatred against the South, and she was led during the war and subsequently to declare slaveholding to be sinful in itself. She deliberately assumed the infidel ground.[92]

Hodge was finally willing to stand upon this so-called "infidel ground" when all hope for unity within his Church was lost.

5. Comparative Analysis

Robert Dabney and Charles Hodge were very similar. Each revered the other so much that in 1860 Hodge implored Dabney to join the Princeton faculty, and even though Dabney refused, he treasured the invitation until the end of his life.[93] Even this, however, seemed to be a last minute attempt on Hodge's part to preserve unity on the verge of the Civil War.[94] Each man embraced commonsense realism and imbibed a "separate spheres" ideology. They both firmly adhered to the Westminster Confession of Faith, and they were both theological giants within Old School Presbyterianism.

They also had notable differences. Charles Hodge was a committed Whig; Dabney was a strident Democrat. Hodge's political heroes were Henry Clay and Abraham Lincoln; Dabney's political heroes were John Randolph and John C. Calhoun, not to mention his excessive admiration for Confederate generals, particularly Thomas "Stonewall" Jackson.[95] Hodge was northern and a Union man; Dabney was

[89] Philip Schaff, "Slavery and the Bible," *Mercersburg Review* 13 (1861): 316–17; cited in Noll, *America's God*, 418–19.

[90] Hodge, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Ephesians,* 6:9.

[91] Guelzo, "Charles Hodge's Anti-Slavery Moment," 323.

[92] Robert Dabney, "The Presbyterian Reunion, North," *The Southern Presbyterian Review* 22.3 (1871): 398.

[93] Lucas, *Robert Lewis Dabney*, 97–98.

[94] Lucas, *Robert Lewis Dabney*, 97.

[95] Lucas, *Robert Lewis Dabney,* 24, 29.

southern and a lifelong, unrepentant Confederate.[96] Hodge fought to preserve unity between northern and southern Old Schoolers and he tried to bring them back together after the war. He strongly opposed the efforts that ultimately succeeded in bringing the northern Old School and the northern New School back together. In his opinion, such a union was more political than theological.[97] Alternatively, Dabney fought against reunion with the northern Church until his dying breath. Over the decades, his students at Union found his anti-northern sentiments intransigent and archaic. On one occasion, a student challenged Dabney's disdain for northerners and their efforts to provide equal rights for blacks; rather than responding, Dabney decided to preach the following Sunday on the passage, "Do not I hate them, O Lord, that hate Thee?"[98] As Sean Lucas observed, Dabney died just as he had assured Charles Hodge the South would live, "unconquered, unconquerable, and forever alienated."[99]

Both Hodge and Dabney imbibed aspects of their regions and their cultures. While individuals like Dabney and Hodge used Baconian induction and commonsense realism to interpret Scripture, some outside of the cultural and theological currents of the day noticed the underlying problems that Dabney and Hodge often overlooked. In 1849, the German Reformed theologian John Williamson Nevin, for example, opined, "If the Bible be at once so clear and full as a formulary of Christian doctrine and practice, how does it come to pass that where men are left most free to use it in this way … they are flung asunder so perpetually … instead of being brought together?"[100] Nevin argued that commonsense realism turned the Bible into no more than a list of rules, something Hodge lent credence to when he described the Bible as a "store-house of facts."[101] The reality that Hodge and Dabney embraced so many of the same philosophical and theological approaches yet came to notably different conclusions reveals commonsense realism's shortcomings. Furthermore, it is telling that Hodge and Dabney's most notable differences reflect their cultural and regional contexts.

Charles Hodge and Robert Dabney engaged the questions of slavery and women's rights in characteristically conservative nineteenth-century ways. Even though Hodge exhibited more nuance and a greater willingness to follow his convictions to unpopular conclusions, he still failed to acknowledge certain possibilities because of his cultural context, and he tempered some of his greatest insights in order to avoid division. Hodge and Dabney prove to be helpful case studies to show just how much baggage even the most astute theologians bring to the text. In 1861, the German Reformed theologian Philip Schaff shrewdly observed that God "instituted marriage and the family relation before the fall, but not slavery."[102] With this observation, Schaff noted that marriage and children are positive goods, but slavery is a tragic result of the Fall.

Dabney so infused hierarchy into his understanding of the world that he could not recognize what Schaff did. For Dabney, wives, children, and slaves were all enslaved in some sense. While Hodge agreed that slavery was a legally recognized institution that could not simply be defied or overthrown, he knew that Scripture required masters to recognize enslaved people as equal brothers and sisters.[103] Hodge also

[96] Guelzo, "Charles Hodge's Anti-Slavery Moment," 304, 307, 323.

[97] Hoffecker, *Charles Hodge: The Pride of Princeton*, 326–28.

[98] Lucas, *Robert Lewis Dabney*, 132.

[99] Lucas, *Robert Lewis Dabney*, 130–31.

[100] John W. Nevin, "The Sect System," *Mercersburg Review* 2–3 (1849–1850); cited in Noll, *America's God,* 403.

[101] Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology,* 3 vols. (New York: Scribner & Company, 1872), 1:10.

[102] Philip Schaff, *Slavery and the Bible: A Tract for the Times* (Chambersburg, PA: Kieffer & Co, 1861), 3 https://archive.org/details/slaverybibletrac00scha.

[103] Hodge, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Ephesians*, 6:5.

recognized that slavery cultivated and sustained hatred between two classes of people. Even though Hodge acknowledged that slavery's racial basis meant ending the institution and granting freed people citizenship would be difficult, he still downplayed just how immense such a struggle would prove.

Dabney fought for "Bible Republicanism" because he was deeply convinced that hierarchy, patriarchy, and black inferiority were simply part of God's created order; for Dabney, this was merely commonsense. Because his political theology was built upon a commitment to patriarchal hierarchy, he perceived every threat to the South's hierarchal social structures as both theological and political heresy. For Dabney, abolitionism threatened a slave's submission to her master, feminism threatened a wife's submission to her husband, and public education threatened a child's submission to his parents. This is why Dabney so vehemently and tirelessly advanced narratives of the Lost Cause and opposed modernism and "Yankeeism" until his dying breath.[104]

Hodge's opinions and how he expressed them often reflected a prioritization of commitments. He aimed foremost to preserve his seminary, his Church, and his nation, as disagreements about slavery posed a grave threat to unity and catholicity. Furthermore, he aimed to defend the Bible and the social order against abolitionists who, he believed, threatened the integrity of both. Of third rank priority, Hodge aimed to end slavery. Women were simply not on Hodge's list of priorities. After all, as Louise Stevenson wisely observed, "Hodge was a man educated by men who taught men and wrote for men."[105] When Hodge defended women's rights, it was simply because he was trying to adhere to Scripture, which is why he defended female authors, for example.[106] Whether Hodge's biblical interpretation was correct or not, he believed Scripture forbade women from publicly prophesying and teaching, but he saw no such prohibitions against women's writings.[107] Such a concession was both significant yet also seriously limited. It cut against the cultural grain while also reenforcing other traditional boundaries.

Hodge and Dabney reflect the theological struggles of many orthodox Protestants in nineteenth-century America. When Hodge and Dabney used their Bibles to understand the surrounding world, they often unintentionally used the surrounding world to understand their Bibles. May their examples humble those who continue to interpret Scripture within the confines of culture. May their examples challenge us to analyze our assumptions as well as the biblical text.

[104] Lucas, *Robert Lewis Dabney,* 191–92.
[105] Stevenson, "Charles Hodge, Womanly Women, and Manly Ministers," 160.
[106] Stevenson, "Charles Hodge, Womanly Women, and Manly Ministers," 168.
[107] Stevenson, "Charles Hodge, Womanly Women, and Manly Ministers," 167–68.

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Christ Existing as Church-Community: Bonhoeffer's Ecclesiology and Religionless Christianity

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Abstract: Bonhoeffer's theology is well known for generating many contradictory interpretations. This is especially the case for his concept of "religionless Christianity." In this article, I argue that the religionless Christianity of *Letters and Papers from Prison* must be understood in light of his theology of sin and ecclesiology. Bonhoeffer's theology of the church presented in his earlier academic works provides the interpretive key to understanding what he wrote later in his life. I present Bonhoeffer's theological sociology of humanity in Adam (*peccatorum communio*) and the community of the church (*sanctorum communio*) in order to offer an interpretation of his religionless Christianity. Bonhoeffer's ecclesiology is both theologically and practically rich and worthy of consideration, but evangelicals should be cautious of areas where Bonhoeffer was influenced by the liberalism of his day.

Nearly every stripe of theology holds Dietrich Bonhoeffer up as a hero. Ironically, conservative evangelicals find themselves with Death of God theologians in claiming Bonhoeffer as their own.[1] Reading his works, one can understand why this is the case. *Letters and Papers from Prison* has a much different feel and tone than his earlier books, such as *Discipleship and Life Together*. He was versatile as a writer and able to write in a variety of styles that appeal to various audiences.

What do we make of all these "variant" Bonhoeffers? To understand Bonhoeffer, we must understand his historical context but also the individuals and schools of thought that influenced him. Bonhoeffer was able to appreciate and critically engage with various philosophers and theologians. This ability allowed him to receive and critique certain teachings of liberal theologians such as Ernest Troeltsch, Adolf von Harnack, and Rudolf Bultmann. He was more conservative than he is made out to be by his liberal interpreters. At the same time, he was more influenced by early twentieth century higher criticism and neo-orthodoxy than many of his conservative interpreters recognize. While I disagree that we "can

[1] For a more liberal reading of Bonhoeffer, see Richard Weikart, "Scripture and Myth in Dietrich Bonhoeffer," *Fides et Historia* 25.1 (1993): 12–25. For a conservative reading of Bonhoeffer, see Georg Huntmann, *The Other Bonhoeffer: An Evangelical Reassessment of Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, trans. Todd Huizinga (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1993). Weikart compares his reading of Bonhoeffer with reception history in Richard Weikart, "So Many Different Dietrich Bonhoeffers," *TrinJ* 32 (2011): 69–81. For a summary of the complexity of reception history see Stephen R. Haynes, *The Bonhoeffer Phenomenon: Portraits of a Protestant Saint* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2004).

lay claim to Bonhoeffer as an evangelical,"[2] it is also off the mark to consider him a theological liberal. Bonhoeffer was theologically orthodox in his doctrines of salvation and the church but neo-orthodox in his theology of the Bible. He was a student of Luther[3] who sought to reform the German Church, which was progressively giving way to Nazi ideology. He followed Barth in attempting to break away from the entrenched liberal theology of his day but was influenced by that same theology.[4] Evangelicals should approach Bonhoeffer with discernment and caution.

Although discernment is needed, Bonhoeffer's creative and urgent thinking can inspire a fresh approach to ecclesiology. Theological orthodoxy permeates his reflections on the nature of the church-community. He was a theologian for the sake of the church. He lived out his love for the concrete and the real in the context of many local churches. Wherever he lived, he found a church to be a part of. He did not love "The Church" as an abstract theological category but the real individuals that made up the local church assembly. Bonhoeffer was driven by a love for the church and a desire to see the centrality of Christ recognized in the church. His Christology is inherently related to his ecclesiology[5] because the church is "Christ existing as church-community." As Nichols puts it, "Christ always and necessarily stands before and above and over Bonhoeffer's ecclesiology; and ethics, which for him can be summed up as love, always and necessarily pours out from and surrounds his ecclesiology."[6] Bonhoeffer's ecclesiology, which flows from Christology and leads to ethics, is theologically and practically rich.

This article presents Bonhoeffer's unique approach to ecclesiology. While some interpreters believe Bonhoeffer jettisoned his theology of the church with his concept of "religionless Christianity" in *Letters and Papers from Prison*, I demonstrate that Bonhoeffer's robust ecclesiology provides a key to understanding what "religionless Christianity" meant.[7] My aim, therefore, is twofold: (1) to introduce Bonhoeffer's ecclesiology as theologically and practically rich for evangelicals; and (2) to present an interpretation of Bonhoeffer's religionless Christianity in light of his ecclesiology.

1. The Sociology and Theology of the Sanctorum Communio

In 1927, when Bonhoeffer was twenty-one years old, he presented a dissertation on the church, *Sanctorum Communio*, to Reinhold Seeberg and the faculty in Berlin. In this work, he explored concepts he would develop throughout his life: the social nature of humanity, the narcissism of sin, revelation and

[2] Stephen Nichols, *Bonhoeffer on the Christian Life* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013). Nichols, however, provides an excellent introduction to Bonhoeffer's theology. Metaxas portrays Bonhoeffer similarly. Eric Metaxas, *Bonhoeffer: Pastor, Martyr, Prophet, Spy* (Nashville: Nelson, 2010).

[3] Michael P. DeJong, *Bonhoeffer's Reception of Luther* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 1–6.

[4] Andreas Pangritz, *Karl Barth in the Theology of Dietrich Bonhoeffer,* trans. Barbara and Martin Rumscheidt, 2nd ed. (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2000), 113–14.

[5] Stephen Estes, "Christ for Us: An Analysis of Bonhoeffer's Christology and Its Implications for His Ethic," *Themelios* 48.1 (2023): 140–52.

[6] Nichols, *Bonhoeffer on the Christian Life,* 61. Also, Strohm notes, "God's act of becoming human in Jesus Christ characteristically determines both his ecclesiology and his entire ethical concept." Christoph Strohm, "Editor's Afterword to the German Edition," in *Ecumenical, Academic and Pastoral Work: 1931–1932,* Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works 11 (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2012), 484.

[7] This approach is similar to Joel Lawrence, *Bonhoeffer: A Guide for the Perplexed* (New York: T&T Clark, 2010), 9. Lawrence sees an underlying theological continuity between Bonhoeffer's earlier works and prison letters.

salvation *extra nos*, ethics, and the presence of Christ in the church-community. These concepts are the conceptual framework for Bonhoeffer's ecclesiology.

1.1. The Human Being as Socially Open and Closed

Bonhoeffer's dissertation, *Sanctorum Communio*, is an interdisciplinary study of the church from a sociological and theological perspective. He begins his sociology of the church by explaining the ethical and sociological nature of the person. He builds on insights from ethics and social philosophy that the human person, by nature, is both an individual and created in and for social relationships.

To emphasize humanity's social nature, Bonhoeffer introduced the concept of the "basic social relation." The basic social relation is the encounter of the individual with another person. The "I" meets a "You." This concept, while very simple, is foundational in Bonhoeffer's theology and the starting point for not only his ecclesiology but also his Christology and ethics.

God designed the human person to be both structurally *closed* and *open*. On the one hand, the person is structurally closed, and the individuality of the person is protected. The "I" does not dissolve into the "you." At the same time, the individual is socially open to others. Relationships are part of what it means to be a person. The person cannot exist in isolation but only in relation to others. Bonhoeffer explains:

> God does not desire a history of individual human beings, but the history of human *community*. However God does not want a community that absorbs the individual into itself but a community of *human beings*. In God's eyes community and individual exist in the same moment and rest in one another.[8]

In other words, God's intention is that the individual's social relationships do not undermine the integrity of the individual. In this insight, Bonhoeffer both appreciated and critiqued Hegel's insight that the human person is social by nature. However, he rejected Hegel's absorption of the individual into the social process.[9] The individual is preserved and protected even though he is woven into community. This sociological foundation helped shape Bonhoeffer's doctrine of the church.

1.2. The Narcissistic Individual and the Peccatorum Communio

Bonhoeffer argued ecclesiology and Christian sociology can only be properly understood with a robust theology of the fall, sin, and death. Sin disrupts the basic social relation and steps in between the individual person, God, and other people. Community with God and man is ruptured because "the fall replaced love with selfishness."[10] Sin acts like a mirror that is placed between the individual and the other, amplifying the "closed structure" of the individual. The nature of sin is that the individual turns in on himself in a narcissistic move (*cor curvum in se*). "The original community of love, as mutual harmony of reciprocally directed wills, is essentially destroyed when one will changes from a loving to an egocentric direction."[11] Bonhoeffer reflects on the nature of "being in Adam" in *Act and Being*. He states, "'In Adam' means to be in untruth, in culpable perversion of the will, that is, of human essence. It

[8] Bonhoeffer, *Sanctorum Communio,* Works 1:80.
[9] Clifford J. Green, *Bonhoeffer: A Theology of Sociology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 39.
[10] Bonhoeffer, *Sanctorum Communio,* Works 1:107.
[11] Bonhoeffer, *Sanctorum Communio,* Works 1:107.

means to be turned inward into one's self, *cor curvum in se*."[12] In the egotistical turn, man gets what he wants: an isolated and fragmented existence away from God and community.

It should be noted that Bonhoeffer's theology of sin and "being in Adam" is directly opposed to Enlightenment insistence on man's autonomy. This can be seen in Kant's description, "Enlightenment is man's exodus from his self-incurred tutelage. Tutelage is the inability to use one's understanding *without the guidance of another person*. This tutelage is self-incurred if its cause lies not in any weakness of the understanding, but in indecision and lack of courage to use the mind *without the guidance of another*."[13] Kant's anthropological turn to the subject cast a long shadow on liberal theology in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. What Kant described as the freedom of self, Bonhoeffer recognized as complete bondage. Bonhoeffer strongly affirmed the doctrine of sin and argued that we need guidance from outside ourselves. Kant's challenge to embrace freedom from "tutelage" was in fact just another expression of the descent into narcissism. According to Bonhoeffer, breaking away from God's guidance is what it means to be "in-Adam" and nothing less than bondage to self.

In the narcissism of sin, community and relationships are fragmented, but it does not undermine the person's structural social relation to others. In the isolated state of being-in-Adam, the person turns God and others into objects and relegates them to "the world of things" rather than true persons in communion.[14] The irony is that, in this state, people can refer to God as a "religious" object and construct a religion. "God has become a religious object, and human beings themselves have become their own creator and lord."[15] This is a reversal of what is true; the creature acts as though he is the sovereign "Creator" and the Creator a creature. This blasphemous manipulation is the only kind of "religion" that fallen humanity can produce.

Fallen humanity, therefore, dethrones God and manipulates him into a customizable religious object. However, since this person is imprisoned within his closed structure and turned in on himself in narcissistic sin, the "god" he creates is nothing more than an idol within his own psyche. The religious-object god is nothing more than a golden calf. After the fall, however, the human person clings to his own sovereignty and follows a god in his own likeness or desires. Ultimately, this is more than a human being can bear because humans were never meant to be creator or lord: "Under the heavy burden of being both creator and bearer of a world, and in the cold silence of their eternal solitude, they begin to be afraid of themselves and shudder."[16] The clawing for transcendence leaves man destitute.

This is not only true of individual "beings in Adam" but is collectively true for humanity-in-Adam. From philosophical sociology and Augustine's concept of *totus Christus*, Bonhoeffer introduces the concept of the "collective person." The "collective person" is based on the structural nature of persons as both closed and open. Ultimately, people are either in the collective person of "Humanity-in-Adam" or "Humanity-in-Christ."[17] Humanity-in-Adam is a collective person who is infinitely fragmented. Because of the unity of humanity in a collective person, Bonhoeffer posits that, in the sin of the individual, there

[12] Bonhoeffer, *Act and Being*, Works 2:137. Also: "In the primal state the relation among human beings is one of giving, in the sinful state it is purely demanding. Every person lives in complete and voluntary isolation." Bonhoeffer, *Sanctorum Communio,* Works 1:108.

[13] Quoted in Jaroslav Pelikan, *A Melody of Theology: A Philosophical Dictionary* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2014), 69. Emphasis added.

[14] Bonhoeffer, *Act and Being*, Works 2:137.

[15] Bonhoeffer, *Act and Being*, Works 2:137.

[16] Bonhoeffer, *Act and Being*, Works 2:138.

[17] Lawrence, *Bonhoeffer: A Guide for the Perplexed*, 15.

is the sin of the whole race. He explains, "When, in the sinful act, the individual spirit rises against God thus climbing to the utmost height of spiritual individuality … the deed committed is at the same time *the deed of the human race* (no longer in the biological sense) *in the individual person.* Thus all humanity falls with each sin, and not one of us is in principle different from Adam."[18] While this may be an overstatement theologically, Bonhoeffer was emphasizing that sin is not merely an individual act that harms that person. Rather, based on his understanding of the person, sin is at once an individual and "supra-individual" deed. The sinful act of the individual is bound to the culpability of humanity and represents the sin of Adam and the whole world.[19]

Sin, therefore, has a profound social impact. It leads to the "experience of common sinfulness" for humanity-in-Adam.[20] Bonhoeffer argues that Isaiah spoke of this when he proclaimed, "Woe to me! I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips" (Isa 6:5). This is the experience of the community of sinners, the *peccatorum communio*, which is "one, though consisting of nothing but individuals. It is a collective person, yet infinitely fragmented. It is Adam, since all individuals are themselves and Adam."[21] The community of sin, the natural state of existence in Adam, can only be overcome and superseded by the community of saints in Christ.

The collective person of humanity-in-Adam is the foil for the splendor of humanity-in-Christ. The *peccatorum communio* must first be understood before we can comprehend the *sanctorum communio*. The religious tendencies of humans after the fall also helps us to understand Bonhoeffer's concept of religion. Religion, even religion that claims to be Christian, may merely be a religion of humanity-in-Adam as opposed to a true religion based on the revelation of Jesus Christ.

1.3. Encounter with Christ Jesus Extra Nos

On November 18, 1943, as Bonhoeffer prepared for Christmas in the Nazi prison, he wrote, "By the way, a prison cell like this is a good analogy for Advent; one waits, hopes, does this or that—ultimately negligible things—the door is locked and can only be opened from the outside."[22] To be freed from the prison of sinful narcissism, people need to be addressed *extra nos*—from outside themselves. God must break in and create something new. Humanity is hopeless and contributes nothing to their salvation. Even religion and philosophy fail because they arise from self and the corruption that imprisons the *peccatorum communio*.

1.3.1. The Nature of the Church: Supernatural Revelation and Historical Community

Bonhoeffer's second major academic work, *Act and Being*, emphasizes the need of *extra nos* salvation and revelation. This work is both a critique and an appreciation of Heidegger's existentialism. Bonhoeffer transforms Heidegger's concept of *Dasein* in light of the revelation of Christ. Bonhoeffer critiques Heidegger's (and, as mentioned earlier, Kant's) assumption that human beings are capable through reason of "giving truth to themselves, of transporting themselves into the truth by themselves."[23]

[18] Bonhoeffer, *Sanctorum Communio,* Works 1:115. Italics original.

[19] Bonhoeffer, *Sanctorum Communio,* Works 1:109, 116.

[20] Bonhoeffer, *Sanctorum Communio,* Works 1:116.

[21] Bonhoeffer, *Sanctorum Communio,* Works 1:116

[22] Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison,* Works 8:188. For a discussion on the place of Bonhoeffer's academic works in his later theology: Eva Harasta, "One Body: Dietrich Bonhoeffer on the Church's Existence as Sinner and Saint at Once," *USQR* 62 (2010): 17–34.

[23] Bonhoeffer, *Act and Being,* Works 2:87.

This is impossible because, he explained, "thinking is as little able as good works to deliver the *cor curvatum in se* from itself."[24] Bonhoeffer understood that sinful humanity can only be freed by the gospel. The person is imprisoned within self and cannot move beyond the confines of selfishness and sin even when he wants to.[25] Sinful humanity needs to encounter truth from the outside: "Only when Christ has broken through the solitude of human beings will they know themselves placed in truth."[26]

For Bonhoeffer, being "placed in truth" happens at the moment of justification. Existence in Adam, which is a prison-like existence, is traded for a new existence in Christ in that moment. In *Ethics*, Bonhoeffer describes this:

> The origin and essence of all Christian life are consummated in the one event that the Reformation has called the justification of the sinner by grace alone. It is not what a person is per se, but what a person is in this event, that gives us insight into the Christian life. Here the length and breadth of human life are concentrated in one moment, one point; the whole of life is embraced in this event. What happens here? Something ultimate that cannot be grasped by anything we are or do, or suffer. The dark tunnel of human life, which was barred within and without and was disappearing ever more deeply into an abyss from which there is no exit, is powerfully torn open; the word of God bursts in.[27]

Sanctorum Communio also describes God's salvific breaking in from the outside by the revelation of Jesus Christ. The gospel, the historical incarnation of Jesus Christ and his death and resurrection, is the only way to restore community. Bonhoeffer was clear that God poured out wrath and judgment on Jesus because of the self-centeredness and sin of humanity. Jesus stood as the new humanity's vicarious representative in his death and resurrection.[28]

1.3.2. Two "Religious" Misunderstandings of the Nature of the Church

The work of Christ established the reality of the church, but the actualization of the history of the church began with Pentecost and the work of the Holy Spirit.[29] Bonhoeffer argued that the church is both a reality of revelation and actualized in concrete history. Therefore, there are typically two ways to misunderstand the nature of the church.[30] The first misunderstanding views the church as a purely historical or social phenomenon. This misunderstanding emphasizes the "religious motives" that make sense of the existence of local churches and religious movements. Bonhoeffer was influenced by Ernst Troeltsch, who emphasized this sociological and historical approach.[31] Later, in his academic lectures at Finkenwalde, he called this misunderstanding the "materialistic-secular" danger.[32] The other misunderstanding, following Barth, emphasizes the transtemporal or supernatural "religious" aspect of

[24] Bonhoeffer, *Act and Being*, Works 2:80.

[25] Bonhoeffer, *Act and Being*, Works 2:45.

[26] Bonhoeffer, *Act and Being*, Works 2:141.

[27] Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, Works 6:146.

[28] Bonhoeffer, *Sanctorum Communio,* Works 1:150–51.

[29] Bonhoeffer, *Sanctorum Communio,* Works 1:152. Bonhoeffer, "The Visible Church in the New Testament," in *Theological Education at Finkenwalde: 1935–1937*, Works 14:438.

[30] Bonhoeffer, *Sanctorum Communio,* Works 1:156.

[31] Michael Mawson, *Christ Existing as Community: Bonhoeffer's Ecclesiology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018),14.

[32] Bonhoeffer, "The Visible Church in the New Testament," Works 14, 435.

the church that does not give proper attention to the concrete nature of the church-community. This view of the church was "idealistic-docetic."[33]

Against these two misunderstandings, Bonhoeffer emphasized that the church is a reality of revelation that is actualized in concrete historical expressions. The two misunderstandings each recognize something true about the church but absolutize one truth to exclude another. Both misunderstandings of the church are, in a way, "religious" misunderstandings. Bonhoeffer is clear: the church is neither a historical religious phenomenon nor a supernatural ideal existing in the "realm of God." He explains, "God established the reality of the church, of humanity pardoned in Jesus Christ—not religion, but revelation, not religious community, but church."[34] The church is a supernatural revelation accomplished and completed in Christ once for all; it is also a revelation that is actualized in time by the Holy Spirit.[35] Ecclesiology avoids the two misunderstandings by recognizing that the church is a visible and concrete reality in history and is also supernaturally established and sustained. In this way, the church's nature reflects the two natures of Jesus Christ.[36] The church has both a concrete and visible form in the history of humanity but also has a hidden divine origin and nature.

Barth's influence on Bonhoeffer is well known. However, Bonhoeffer's ecclesiology is an appreciative critique of Barth's theology.[37] Bonhoeffer recognized the value of Barth's recovery of the freedom of God and his emphasis on revelation. Barth's theology, however, remains removed from everyday life and renders the church irrelevant.[38] Bonhoeffer's ecclesiology emphasizes the historical and concrete by presenting the local church or "assembly" as the place where God's revelation of the church is actualized. The local church, what Bonhoeffer calls the "empirical" church, is central to his conception of the church-community. The "concrete function of the empirical church" is the preaching of the word and celebrating of the sacraments.[39] A "Christian" who stays away from the local church is a "contradiction in

[33] Bonhoeffer, "The Visible Church in the New Testament," Works 14:435. This is a critique of Barth's early theology.

[34] Bonhoeffer, *Sanctorum Communio,* Works 1:153.

[35] Bonhoeffer, *Sanctorum Communio,* Works 1:153.

[36] Bonhoeffer, "What Is Church?" in *Berlin:1932–1933*, Works 12:264.

[37] Joachim von Soosten, "Editor's Afterword to the German Edition," in *Sanctorum Communio,* Works 1:294. Many have noted that the approach to the *extra Calvinisticum* is a key difference between Barth's Reformed theology and Bonhoeffer's Lutheran theology. Bonhoeffer was clear: because of the incarnation, the finite contains the infinite (*finitum capax infiniti*). Bonhoeffer's denial of the *extra Calvinisticum* in the classical sense of *finitum non est capax infinitum* is one of the features that made his theology susceptible to the charges of liberalism. Bonhoeffer's insistence that the finite contains the infinite, and that Christ exists as church-community, led to the assumption that Bonhoeffer logically denied the existence of an infinite God outside of the church. Bonhoeffer's denial of the *non capax* allowed liberal interpreters to collapse his theology into an immanent frame. Bonhoeffer himself avoided this by his emphasis on the relation in distinction between Christ as head and church as body. In fact, the Calvinistic extra fits well with Bonhoeffer's emphasis that God must address us and save us *extra nos*. Bonhoeffer did not do away with the need for a Savior outside of us in his doctrine of Christ *pro me.* He held the tension of this dialect without collapsing it into a synthesis that undermined God's fundamental freedom and transcendence. Those who interpret him as a liberal push him to conclusions in a way that Bonhoeffer never intended. DeJong, *Bonhoeffer's Reception of Luther,* 14. H. Gaylon Baker, *The Cross of Reality: Luther's Theologia Crucis and Bonhoeffer's Christology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2015), 30. Andreas Pangritz, *Karl Barth in the Theology of Dietrich Bonhoeffer,* 153–54.

[38] Mawson, *Christ Existing as Community,* 44.

[39] Bonhoeffer, *Sanctorum Communio,* Works 1:226.

terms." While remaining imperfect and full of justified sinners, the local church is where God is present and active.

1.4. The Ethics of the Church: Being with and for Others

For Bonhoeffer, the church is a miracle of revelation and the place where the triune God restores community. Sin amplifies the "closed" structure of the person, creating isolation, and twists the "open" structure of the person, generating a community of fragmentation. God's establishment of the church-community in Christ by the Spirit addresses both aspects of the person as "closed" and "open." Christ heals the individual and the community. Later in his writing, in *Life Together,* this insight would inspire Bonhoeffer to emphasize both "The Day Alone" and the "The Day Together."[40] In *Sanctorum Communio,* Bonhoeffer emphasized the predestination of the individual as crucial for a theology of the church: "God sees the church-community of Christ and the individual in a *single act.* God therefore really sees the individual, and God's election really applies to the individual."[41]

The gospel message addresses the person as an individual and allows the Spirit to encounter him in solitude, but at the same time the Spirit leads that person out of isolation into community: "The Holy Spirit brings Christ to individuals (Rom 8:14; Eph 2:22) and establishes community among them (2 Cor 13:13; Phil 2:1)."[42] Bonhoeffer made the same observation in *Discipleship*. The individual meets Jesus Christ and enters discipleship alone, but the individual's discipleship takes place in the context of the church, the "community of the cross."[43] The Christian life, then, is life together in discipleship in the church-community.

The church is not only a community of the cross but also a community of love. The individual persons within the community exist *with* and *for* others.[44] Existing *with* others points to the reality that Bonhoeffer would explore more fully in *Life Together.* The church is made up of members of the body of Christ, and they are also members with one another. They are connected. When one suffers, the whole body suffers. When one rejoices, the whole body rejoices. The persons in the community also exist *for* one another. Living *for* one another takes Jesus Christ as the standard of conduct and emphasizes a life of selfless action for neighbor, intercessory prayer, confession, and forgiveness of sins.[45] Again, the connection between Christology, ecclesiology, and ethics becomes evident. The vicarious action of Jesus Christ becomes the basis of the church and, imitating Jesus, the loving and sacrificial action of the members forms the ethics of the community.[46]

The ethics of the community shape not only how members interact with each other and their neighbors but also how the collective community of the church interacts with the broader society.

[40] Bonhoeffer, *Life Together,* Works 5:48, 81.

[41] Bonhoeffer, *Sanctorum Communio,* Works 1:165. Italics original.

[42] Bonhoeffer, *Sanctorum Communio,* Works 1:139.

[43] Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship*, Works 4:99.

[44] Bonhoeffer, *Sanctorum Communio,* Works 1:184. "Christ died for the church-community so that it may live *one* life, *with each other* and *for each other."*

[45] Bonhoeffer, *Sanctorum Communio,* Works 1:184. Joel Lawrence demonstrates the central place of confession in Bonhoeffer's ecclesiological ethics in "Death Together: Dietrich Bonhoeffer on Becoming the Church for Others," in *Bonhoeffer, Christ and Culture,* ed. Keith L. Johnson and Timothy Larson (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2013), 113–29.

[46] Von Soosten, "Editor's Afterword to the German Edition," in *Sanctorum Communio,* Works 1:294; Lawrence, *Bonhoeffer: A Guide for the Perplexed,* 31.

Bonhoeffer recognized that the church is simultaneously political and apolitical, because the church is a social community formed within a secular community. The church's proclamation "is directed at the political order in which humans are bound."[47] The church-community as a collective person addresses the political order and limits the action of the state. However, it would be a mistake for the church to become the tool of party politics. In doing so, the church imprisons itself to the limits of the political order and would be "tortured and torn apart." The church is to stand in the world as the witness of God's revelation. Taking on the mantle of the party politics would be accepting the limits of the political world and close the church off from God's revelation. Bonhoeffer witnessed the German church progressively taking on this mantle of party politics. In 1933, Bonhoeffer warned, "Nothing would be more destructive and detrimental for the Protestant church in the current situation than if, as the last politically unspent force in Germany, it unthinkingly let itself be used in party politics. That would certainly mean its end."[48] The next year, the Barmen declaration issued a strong stand against the political tide of the nation. However, over the next ten years, Bonhoeffer watched as the church capitulated to the politics of the Nazi regime.

1.5. The Presence of Christ in the Church-Community

Ultimately, for Bonhoeffer, the supernatural power of the church is not found in imitating an absent Christ but proclaiming a present and reigning Christ. Jesus is present in the church. Bonhoeffer's ecclesiology builds on the Augustinian concept of *totus Christus.* "Christ existing as church-community" refers to the body of Christ, which includes the head, Christ himself, and the members. In this understanding, Jesus Christ is identified with the church as his body and distinguished from the church as her Lord. Estes has recently explained Bonhoeffer's theology of Jesus Christ *pro me* revealed in the church.[49] Part of the *pro me* of Bonhoeffer's christological ecclesiology is the presence of Jesus Christ in the local church or "assembly." Jesus Christ is *present* for the individual:

> If we want to hear his call to discipleship, we need to hear it where Christ himself is present. It is within the church that Jesus Christ calls through his word and sacrament. To hear Jesus' call to discipleship, one needs no personal revelation. Listen to the preaching and receive the sacrament! Listen to the gospel of the crucified and risen Lord! Here is the whole Christ, the very same who encountered the disciples.[50]

The primary way Jesus is present and visible in the church-community is through the word and the sacraments.

Bonhoeffer's love for the Bible is unmistakable.[51] In the Bible, the believer should expect to meet with the risen Christ. John Webster explains that, for Bonhoeffer, the text makes Christ present through

[47] Bonhoeffer, "What Is Church?" Works 12:265.

[48] Bonhoeffer, "What Is Church?" Works 12:266.

[49] Estes, "Christ for Us," 140–52.

[50] Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship*, Works 4:99.

[51] Bonhoeffer, "Lectures on Christology," in *Berlin: 1932–1933*, Works 12:331. Evangelicals should note that Bonhoeffer's theology of Scripture is neo-orthodox. In 1924/1925, Bonhoeffer was influenced by Barth's *The Word of God and the Word of Man*, which undermined the liberal influence of Adolf von Harnack. Bonhoeffer's conversion to neo-orthodox thought was initially "like a liberation." Andreas Pangritz, *Karl Barth in the Theology of Dietrich Bonhoeffer,* 15. See also John Webster, *Word and Church: Essays in Christian Dogmatics,* 2nd ed. (New York: T&T Clark, 2006), 87–110.

the power of the Holy Spirit.[52] This is why the Bible was one of Bonhoeffer's greatest consolations as he waited in prison near the end of his life. As Yarborough puts it, "God … spoke so powerfully to him as he pored intensively over scripture while his life drew to a close."[53] Bonhoeffer highly valued the Bible in the life of the individual. Still, the Bible is most properly proclaimed in the context of the church: "The church community is the space where the proclamation of this word takes place."[54] In this proclamation, God meets with his people and the local church is "held together by an assembling around the word."[55] It is at this assembly where the word is taught that Jesus is present in a special way for the church-community and for the individual.

Jesus Christ is also present in the local church assembly through the sacraments. The sacraments are united to the preaching of the word, and the Holy Spirit uses them to build the church-community.[56] Bonhoeffer, as a Lutheran, argued that infant baptism was a demonstration of the faith of the community. He argued that infant baptism is primarily an act of the church-community, in which the child is incorporated into that community but also mandated to remain within that community for all of life. The Lord's Supper is received by the faith of the individual and the church-community. In the Lord's Supper, Bonhoeffer argues, "Christ's presence in spirit is not merely symbolic, but a given reality."[57]

2. Religionless Christianity

Now that Bonhoeffer's theology of sin and ecclesiology has been presented, it is possible to understand what he meant by "religionless Christianity" and its relation to the church. On April 30, 1944, Bonhoeffer sat down in his prison cell and wrote to Eberhard Bethge, "Is there such a thing as religionless Christianity? If religion is only the garb in which Christianity is clothed—and this garb looks very different in different ages—what then is religionless Christianity?"[58] Bonhoeffer's questions and thought project about a "religionless Christianity" must be considered in a discussion of his ecclesiology. One of the major questions in Bonhoeffer scholarship is whether *Letters and Papers from Prison* should be read in continuity or discontinuity from his earlier works. It is undeniable that the tone is different. However, the discontinuity that has been noticed has more to do with the difference in genre than a shift in his belief and doctrine. The letters written in prison were personal, written to a close friend and not intended for publication. Not only that, but the actual content of the letters has much more continuity with earlier writings than is sometimes recognized.[59] Bonhoeffer affirmed development in his thought, but a development that rested on an underlying continuity. As he reflected on *Discipleship* in his prison

[52] John Webster, *Holy Scripture: A Dogmatic Sketch* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 81–82; Webster, *Word and Church,* 101.

[53] Robert W. Yarbrough, "Bonhoeffer as Bible Scholar," *Themelios* 37.2 (2012): 189.

[54] Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship,* Works 4:231.

[55] Bonhoeffer, *Sanctorum Communio*, Works 1:227.

[56] Bonhoeffer, *Sanctorum Communio*, Works 1:240. Lawrence notes, "The Spirit mediates Christ's presence and so it is the Spirit who creates the church-community at baptism." Lawrence, *Bonhoeffer: A Guide for the Perplexed*, 47.

[57] Bonhoeffer, *Sanctorum Communio*, Works 1:243.

[58] Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, Works 8:363.

[59] Yarbrough, "Bonhoeffer as Bible Scholar," 188; Lawrence, *Bonhoeffer: A Guide for the Perplexed,* 9.

letters, he said, "Today I see the dangers of that book, though I still stand by it."[60] The earlier writings of Bonhoeffer should be allowed to assist in interpreting his theology in the prison writings.

In light of this, Bonhoeffer's concept of "religion" informs what he means by "religionless Christianity." From his earliest writings, Bonhoeffer linked "religion" with the religious *a priori*. The religious *a priori* assumes that man is capable of true religious experience by nature and apart from revelation. As early as *Act and Being,* Bonhoeffer was suspicious of this concept. Scholarship in Germany had come to assume the religious *a priori* until Barth thoroughly critiqued natural religion. As seen earlier in this paper, Bonhoeffer knew how "religion" could be reshaped and manipulated when the religious subject became creator and lord of this religion. Religious *a priori* is opposed to God's revelation in Christ. Bonhoeffer explained, "Having been wrought by God, faith runs counter to natural religiosity, for which the religious *a priori* noted by Seeberg naturally holds good…. All that pertains to personal appropriation of the fact of Christ is not *a priori*, but God's contingent action on human beings."[61]

However, there is a true and proper "religion," which is a religion initiated by God's sovereign revelation, as opposed to the natural religion of religious *a priori*. Bonhoeffer explains the distinction between religion and revelation, "God established the reality of the church, of humanity pardoned in Jesus Christ—not religion, but revelation, *not religious community, but church*. This is what the reality of Jesus Christ means."[62]

For Bonhoeffer, religion and church are distinct but overlapping realities. If Bonhoeffer spoke of religion positively, he meant the religion of the empirical church that was truly "Christ existing as church-community." But religious *a priori* is part of humanity-in-Adam. Religion, in this sense, is driven by natural impulses and philosophy, and lacks God's supernatural revelation. In other words, religious Christianity is a trivialized and sensationalized substitute for true church-community.[63] It has the tendency to be kitsch and overly sentimentalized. It lacks the substance of real Christianity. For this reason, Bonhoeffer contrasts obedience to God's revelation with religion. Bonhoeffer explains, "Because the church is concerned with God, the Holy Spirit, and the word, it is concerned not specifically with religion, but rather with *obedience* to the word…. It is not the religious question or some religious concern in the larger sense that constitutes the church … but obedience to the word."[64]

When Bonhoeffer spoke of religionless Christianity, he did not mean a churchless Christianity. Bonhoeffer was familiar with the concept of the church subsiding to a more secular existence through his familiarity with Richard Rothe's *Theologische Ethik*, of which he possessed a copy. Bonhoeffer's argument was self-consciously distinct from Rothe's conception of a *churchless* Christian society. What Bonhoeffer meant was the end of a "religious community" that was devoid of revelation and faith. Bonhoeffer recognized that after World War II, the emptiness of a Christless, "religious" church would be revealed. Religious community would need to be replaced with the church-community as Bonhoeffer envisioned it. This is why, even in a letter to Bethge where he speaks of religionless Christianity, he can also speak of the church's rightful place at the center of the village.[65] Bonhoeffer longed to see Christ have his rightful place at the center of the world through his body, the church.

[60] Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, Works 8:468.
[61] Bonhoeffer, *Act and Being*, Works 2:58.
[62] Bonhoeffer, *Sanctorum Communio*, 153. Cf. Bonhoeffer, *Act and Being*, Woks 2:93–94.
[63] Huntmann, *The Other Bonhoeffer*, 109.
[64] Bonhoeffer, "The Visible Church in the New Testament," Works 14:442.
[65] Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, Works 8:367.

As Bonhoeffer reflected on the "world come of age" and religionless Christianity, he began working on a summary outline of a book where he planned to write about these concepts. His outline reveals a continuity and consistency with his ecclesiology. His outline ended with a chapter that was consistent with ecclesiological concepts explored in *Ethics* and *Sanctorum Communio.* "The church," he said, "is church only when it is there for others."[66] He continued:

> The church must participate in the worldly tasks of life in the community—not dominating but helping and serving. It must tell people in every calling what a life with Christ is, what it means "to be there for others." In particular, *our* church will have to confront the vices of hubris, the worship of power, envy, and illusionism as the roots of all evil. It will have to speak with moderation, authenticity, trust, faithfulness, steadfastness, patience, discipline, humility, modesty, contentment.[67]

Bonhoeffer's vision of a religionless Christianity was not the dismissal of his ecclesiology. It is the outworking of his christological and ethical ecclesiology where "Christ exists as church-community" in the concrete local church as the members live life together and for others.

If Bonhoeffer had lived to develop his thought project of religionless Christianity, one can speculate where it may have ended up. Would he have taken a more classically liberal turn? Or would he have emphasized, in a fresh way, the concrete reality of the church for others in a way that resonated with his earlier writings? Attempts to answer these questions are speculation rather than interpretation. Any interpretation of Bonhoeffer's religionless Christianity must consider the boundaries and distinctives he set in his ecclesiology. Bonhoeffer's earlier writings and ecclesiology informs his religionless Christianity.

3. Conclusion

Bonhoeffer's theology of the church celebrates the wonder of the salvation of sinners and life together in the church-community. His doctrine of the church and emphasis on the local church makes him a fruitful dialogue partner for evangelicals. While there are areas where Bonhoeffer's theology should be rejected as unbiblical and harmful, Bonhoeffer's creativity and clarity on the relationship of philosophical sociology and ecclesiology allows us to approach the church from a fresh perspective. We do not need to be afraid of Bonhoeffer's concept of religionless Christianity. It is a reminder that the church is not merely a social and historical entity but a reality of revelation.

The church is the place where God has supernaturally acted. Bonhoeffer reminds us of the devastation of sin on community and relationships and the solution provided in the church. He turns our eyes to the center, the beauty of the present and reigning Jesus Christ, and outward to others in self-sacrificing action. His ecclesiology does not turn us to speculative and abstract theology but invites us to the assembly of the concrete, empirical local church. There, we meet the risen Lord Jesus and discover how to live for the sake of others.

[66] Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, Works 8:503.
[67] Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, Works 8:503.

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PASTORAL PENSÉES

Cut Off Your Hand, Save Your Soul: How the Outer Self Affects the Inner Self in the Fight against Lust

— Greg Palys —

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Abstract: Prayer, Scripture memory, and Scripture meditation are essential strategies for battling lust. Yet Christ's stark commands to cut off a hand and tear out an eye reveal the role our outer selves play in the fight against lust. These commands identify that our outer selves are not merely a means by which we externalize lust but are also a means by which we can either inflame or dampen lust. Matthew 5:27–30 invites us to cut off touchpoints with temptation and to expect that this will diminish lust, thereby aiding the paramount work of inward heart change.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus provides one of Scripture's most vivid, memorable, and convicting images when he turns his attention to lust (Matt 5:27–30).[1] Jesus not only exposes the lustful thoughts that lead to adultery (5:27–28), but he also challenges us to take extreme action to eliminate opportunities to lust. If necessary, we must "tear out" our eye or "cut off" our hand if by either we engage in lust (5:29–30).[2] On the surface, Jesus's commands in 5:29–30 are straightforward. Yet their intensity causes us to wonder how to apply them. Further, even if we were to obey them literally (i.e., following the exact details), how could we expect external means to accomplish internal work? These questions have led to a litany of interpretations, leading one commentator to conclude: "The precise thrust of vv. 29–30 in the present context remains elusive."[3]

I, however, contend that we must let the details of Jesus's commands in Matthew 5:27–30 land *before* we seek to clarify their application. If we do, we learn a key means by which Jesus desires us to accomplish the thrust of his demands. When Jesus commands us to tear out our eye or cut off our hand, he implies that doing so will help us lust less. In this passage, Jesus draws attention to the role of

[1] Thanks to Dan Kane, Jim Williams, Chris O'Mara, my wife Sarah, and fellow brothers and sisters at College Park Church who helped make this article better.

[2] All Scripture quotations come from the ESV.

[3] John Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 238.

the outer self in the fight against lust.[4] Through vivid illustration, Jesus intends to teach that the outer self does not merely reflect the inner self but also affects the inner self. In context, this teaching applies specifically, though perhaps not only, to sexual sin. Though the extreme example presented is merely hypothetical, Jesus expects his followers to observe the force of his command with no less vigor.

To be clear, the Sermon on the Mount and the whole of Scripture place the priority of the Christian life on the inner self (Matt 5:21–26; 6:19–23; Rom 12:2; 2 Cor 4:16; Eph 2:8–9; Phil 3:1–11). Good works should stem from inner change (Matt 7:24–27; Jas 2:17); conversely, a wicked heart will expose itself by its evil works (Matt 7:15–20). Jesus has a name for those who invert this order and prioritize the outer self at the expense of the inner self: hypocrites (Matt 6:1–18). Therefore, Matthew 5:27–30 does not subvert our necessary emphasis on the inner self.

Yet Matthew 5:27–30 also recognizes that God made us as whole people. We are embodied, therefore our outer selves are not incidental to our Christian life. Instead, our outer selves play a key role in battling lust in particular. According to Matthew 5:27–30, disciples should ruthlessly eliminate external sources of sexual sin. In doing so, disciples will lust less in their hearts. To arrive at this thesis, I walk through each of Jesus's two statements (Matt 5:27–28 and 5:29–30) in turn. In each section, I seek to help us best understand the statement by addressing the three most important interpretive questions related to the statement. Finally, I attempt to show not only how these two statements are logically connected but also how this connection informs the meaning of Jesus's commands in Matthew 5:29–30.

1. Matthew 5:27–28: Lust and Adultery

Jesus addresses lust in a section of the Sermon on the Mount typically styled the "antitheses" (Matt 5:21–48). Though some reject the potential antinomian connotations arising from the term, "antitheses," most agree that this section contains six examples of the principle Jesus elucidates in Matthew 5:17–20. Since Jesus came to fulfill the law (i.e., "the body of guiding precepts that shape the stipulations of the old Mosaic covenant and that are found within the Law/Torah/Pentateuch, most specifically in Exodus–Deuteronomy"[5]), he reserves the right to correctly interpret the law. In each

[4] Scripture acknowledges that each human is both material and more than material. It uses the term "inner self" to collectively refer to all that is immaterial in each person: the will, intellect, emotions, etc. (2 Cor 4:16). However, in referencing an inner and outer self throughout this article, I do not mean to imply that my argument hangs on a certain model of human constitution (e.g., monism, dualism, trichotomy), though I myself am most persuaded by holistic dualism. Jesus does not explicitly teach a model for human constitution in the present passage, therefore I believe that those who hold any orthodox belief regarding human constitution (e.g., not pure materialism or idealism) and who also embrace some level of holism between our outer and inner selves could agree with my conclusions. Contra Shinall, who believes that this and other Matthean "dismemberment logia" (5:29–30; 18:8–9; 19:12; 24:45–51) explicitly support dualism. Myrick C. Shinall Jr., "Dismemberment, Dualism, and Theology of the Body in the Gospel of Matthew," *BTB* 44 (2014): 185–94.

[5] Jason S. DeRouchie, *Delighting in the Old Testament: Through Christ and for Christ* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2024), xxii.yet incorrect teaching of its texts abounds in the church. Without effectively studying these stories, covenants, and kingdoms within their close, continuing, and complete biblical contexts, believers miss the beauty of the Old Testament, including how it points to Jesus, and why it still matters today.Jason DeRouchie helps Christians delight in the books of the Old Testament and read them the way God intended—as relevant parts of Christian Scripture. This accessible guide stresses the need to keep Christ at the center and to account for the progress of salvation history when applying the Old Testament today. It helps Christians interpret the Old Testament, see how it testifies to Jesus, believe that Jesus secured every divine promise, and understand how Jesus makes Mo-

of the six examples, Jesus quotes from the law (e.g., Ἠκούσατε ὅτι ἐρρέθη in Matthew 5:27) and then gives his definitive interpretation (ἐγὼ δὲ λέγω ὑμῖν).[6] Frederick Bruner notes that the ἐγὼ is fronted in Jesus's interpretations, which serves to emphasize that Jesus's words carry greater authority than even the law.[7] However, in contrasting the law with his interpretation, Jesus does not mean to put his words in opposition to the law. Rather, he seeks to unveil the heart behind the law, thereby revealing the lofty righteousness of God and the true expectations for those in his kingdom (2 Cor 3:12–18).

In Jesus's second example (Matt 5:27–30), he addresses adultery (μοιχεύσεις). R. T. France points out that, after quoting the sixth commandment "verbatim" from the LXX (Exod 20:15; Matt 5:21), Jesus here does the same from the seventh commandment (Exod 20:13).[8] In other words, Jesus means to tackle fundamental doctrine. Jesus affirms the prohibition against adultery yet takes the matter deeper. No one can claim they have obeyed the law if they have simply avoided sexual contact with a married woman or with someone other than one's spouse. Instead, even a lustful look constitutes adultery.

Interpreters have long observed that Jesus seems here to connect the seventh and tenth commandments.[9] Craig Keener notices that the term used for looking lustfully (ἐπιθυμέω) in Matthew 5:28 is identical to that which we typically translate as "covet" in LXX Exodus 20:17 (οὐκ ἐπιθυμήσεις τὴν γυναῖκα τοῦ πλησίον σου).[10] Additionally, Keener cites numerous Jewish texts that link lust to adultery, concluding that Jesus was not informing his hearers of anything new.[11] Thus Jesus, in Matthew 5:27–28, draws a seemingly straightforward connection between lust and adultery by way of covetousness. However, questions regarding this passage still arise at three major points: (1) In what ways is lust similar to adultery? (2) What constitutes lust? and (3) Does the context of Matthew 5:27–28 restrict its application?

1.1. In What Ways Is Lust Similar to Adultery?

The answer to this first question requires that we carefully define both lust and adultery. We can define adultery more easily. Adultery is an outward, obvious act. It happens at the point where two people, at least one of whom is married, initiate sexual contact. Jesus, however, teaches that adultery has "*already*" happened when someone lusts. If this is true, several other factors must be true as well. First, the kind of lust Jesus refers to in this passage is sexual lust. Though ἐπιθυμέω can refer to non-sexual

ses's law still matter. By more strongly comprehending Old Testament teachings and how they relate to the New, Christians will better enjoy the Old Testament itself and increasingly understand all that Jesus came to fulfill.In-Depth Study: Shows the lasting relevance of Old Testament laws, history, prophecy, and wisdom, and gives insight into the authors and audience of Old Testament booksA Great Resource for Pastors, Students, and Small Groups: Prepares Christian leaders to faithfully teach the Old Testament and equips all Christians to embrace that the Old Testament is Christian ScriptureAccessible: Includes numerous case studies, "Review and Reflection" points for every chapter, and a glossary of key terms.

[6] The exception, perhaps, being the sixth example of loving one's enemies (Matt 5:43–48). Instead of quoting the Law, Jesus may here be quoting a typical understanding of the Law, which took hating one's enemy as an implication of loving one's neighbor, looking to the imprecatory Psalms as examples.

[7] Frederick Dale Bruner, *Matthew 1–12: The Christbook*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 220.

[8] R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 204.

[9] See, for example, Aquinas, who also approvingly quotes Augustine. Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Gospel of St. Matthew*, trans. Paul M. Kimball (Camillus, NY: Dolorosa, 2012), 194–95.

[10] Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of Matthew: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 187.

[11] Keener, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 186–87.

desire (e.g., the desire for a neighbor's possessions in the tenth commandment, Exod 20:17 LXX), more often the term refers to a specific kind of sexual desire.[12] Second, the nature of lust must be similar to adultery. By linking the seventh and tenth commandments, Jesus identifies that both adultery and lust find at their root covetousness, an inordinate desire for what one does not have (Jas 4:1–2). Therefore, both lust and adultery are a kind of sexual covetousness. Third, adultery must originate from lust. Adultery is, in a sense, a worse sin than lust.[13] Yet adultery cannot happen without lust, while lust can happen without adultery. The outward act of adultery merely brings the inward act of lust to full flower. Fourth, lust must, at least at first, be temporally prior to adultery. If lust is adultery before physical adultery has taken place, then it must occur at some point before the physical act. Lust occurs in the heart (ἐν τῇ καρδίᾳ αὐτοῦ) before it manifests outwardly.[14] Therefore, due to these four factors, we might rightly define lust as "heart adultery."

1.2. What Constitutes Lust?

If lust is heart adultery, i.e., sexual covetousness before adultery from which adultery originates, then a second question arises: What qualifies as lust? In other words, how do I know when I have crossed the line? On the one hand, not all looking is lust. Otherwise, no one with eyes could obey Jesus's command. On the other hand, according to this passage, lust is a *kind* of looking. Jesus does not prohibit looking at women, but rather looking at women *lustfully*. In a sense, this is uncomplicated. John Stott says pointedly, though perhaps imprecisely, "We all know the difference between looking and lusting."[15] However, France recognizes the pastoral challenge latent in this passage and therefore exhorts us to avoid interpretations that unnecessarily offend "tender adolescent consciences."[16]

Some find the key to arriving at the distinction between lust and otherwise in the finer points of grammar in Matthew 5:27–28. For instance, some place weight on the aspect of the word "looks" (βλέπων). Noting that this participle is in the present tense (imperfective aspect), they argue that Jesus does not refer to *a look* but rather to *continuous looking*. In other words, "Jesus refers not to *noticing* a person's beauty, but to imbibing it, meditating on it, seeking to possess it."[17] However, though the present tense can carry a continuous sense, it does not do so in every circumstance. If the present tense always carries a continuous sense, then, as Daniel Wallace humorously identifies, four verses later Jesus must only be addressing those who continuously divorce their wives (Matt 5:31).[18] Scot McKnight is therefore cautious to avoid the presumption that the present tense carries a continuous sense in this case, lest the

[12] D. A. Carson notes that this word can even have a "positive force," though it more often conveys something negative. He points to Romans 1:24 as a key example of this negative sense tied explicitly to sexual sin. D. A. Carson, "Matthew," in *Matthew–Mark*, ed. Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland, rev. ed., EBC 9 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 185.

[13] Though all sins are equally deserving of God's punishment (Jas 2:10), some sins are worse than others in that they generate greater consequences and require that the sinner act with a higher level of complicity (John 19:11).

[14] Here and consistently throughout Scripture the heart refers not simply to our feelings but rather our inner self: what drives us, motivates us, and ravishes us (cf. Matt 5:8). See Jeremy Pierre, *The Dynamic Heart in Daily Life: Connecting Christ to Human Experience* (Greensboro, NC: New Growth, 2016).

[15] John R. W. Stott, *The Message of the Sermon on the Mount*, BST (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1985), 87.

[16] France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 204.

[17] Keener, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 189 (emphasis original).

[18] Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), 616.

reader believe that Jesus merely condemns the length of time a man looks lustfully at a woman (i.e., "if anyone *stares* at a woman…").[19] Jesus also condemns the quick, lustful look.

Others focus not on βλέπων but on the function of the infinitival phrase πρὸς τὸ ἐπιθυμῆσαι. This line of thinking seeks answers not in the length of the looking but in the nature of the look. Interpreters typically follow one of two paths. Some argue that the phrase expresses result. In this case, Jesus prohibits looking at a woman with the result that one lusts after her. This does not seem to be simply another way of arguing that Jesus condemns staring. Rather, advocates for this view seem to imply that the initial look itself may include sexual attraction, yet it does not qualify as "lust" until it meets certain criteria. For instance, Dale Allison argues that the text "implies that the sin lies not in the entrance of a thought but in letting it invite passion."[20] On this view, it seems that interpreters seek to distinguish between a fleeting sexual thought and lust, the point at which a person entertains and feeds the thought.

Most follow a different path, believing that the infinitival phrase expresses purpose. Bruner, for example, differentiates between looking "with lust" and "in order to lust."[21] The former is unavoidable; it captures the natural, intrinsically good attraction to that which is beautiful and desirable. The latter describes lust, the "second look or stare" that crosses the line into objectification of that which is beautiful and desirable for selfish and sinful purposes.[22] In Bruner's mind, Jesus only prohibits the intentional or passive actions taken by one who desires to lust.[23]

Like Bruner, Aquinas also seems to view purpose as the key signifier of a kind of look that is adulterous. In Matthew 5:27–30, he sees two kinds of "concupiscence" (i.e., desire) and a movement between the two. The first he calls "propassion," a desire which may be sexual yet lacks "the consent of reason."[24] The propassion shifts to "passion" at the point of "concomitance…and then there is a mortal sin."[25] In other words, one may look and find that he lusts, but one sins when one looks in order to lust.

To summarize, those who opt to translate the infinitival phrase πρὸς τὸ ἐπιθυμῆσαι as expressing result do so because they seek to differentiate between a passing, interested glance and an invitation to the lust which that glance aroused. Those who opt for purpose believe this turn happens when someone conspires with his or her desires and embraces lust. Therefore, in one sense, these options seem identical. In both situations, the person who lusts intends to lust. Framing this movement as a "result," however, could imply that one may simply slide into lust without wanting to. Yet this is never possible. Whether or not one recognizes that they have crossed the line into cultivating lust, no one does so merely passively. Jesus would not have implicated us for our lust if lust was not our fault. Even proponents of the "result" option recognize the presence of willful desire in lust. Again, Allison believes that "sin lies not in the entrance of a thought but in *letting* it invite passion" (emphasis mine).[26] Therefore, it seems best to say that πρὸς τὸ ἐπιθυμῆσαι expresses purpose.

So, a look is lustful when it is done with lustful purpose. Yet even still, this definition does not seem to be precise enough. Allison, Bruner, and Aquinas each seem to allow that the initial, pre-adulterous look can include sexual attraction, though they do not call it sin. At the core of their allowance seems to

[19] Scot McKnight, *Sermon on the Mount*, SGBC (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2013), 87–88.
[20] W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, *Matthew 1–7*, ICC (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1988), 523.
[21] Bruner, *Matthew 1–12*, 220.
[22] Bruner, *Matthew 1–12*, 221.
[23] Bruner, *Matthew 1–12*, 221.
[24] Aquinas, *Commentary on the Gospel of St. Matthew*, 195.
[25] Aquinas, *Commentary on the Gospel of St. Matthew*, 195.
[26] Davies and Allison, *Matthew 1–7*, 523.

be a true recognition that we are attracted to beauty in creation and that this appreciation for beauty is, at a minimum, not objectively wrong. Indeed, Scripture does not here or anywhere condemn appreciating objective beauty, yet this is not the issue. Jesus here condemns any look laden with sexual covetousness. One can indeed recognize something as objectively beautiful without lusting. Yet Jesus teaches that we cross the line into lust the moment we desire what we must not have.[27]

Therefore, the meaning of Jesus's teaching in Matthew 5:28 does not lie in the difference between purpose and result nor between a quick look and a leering stare. Rather, the meaning lies in Jesus's identification of lust as sexual covetousness. Therefore, Jesus prohibits any lustful look, which means Jesus prohibits any desire to take that which is illicit.

1.3. Does the Context of Matthew 5:27–28 Restrict Its Application?

Having established that lust is sexual covetousness and that lust occurs at the moment one desires that which is illicit, a third question remains regarding Matthew 5:27–28: Does the context of Matthew 5:27–28 restrict the application of this passage in any way? Commentators have offered several possibilities: (1) restricted to flirtation, (2) restricted to married women, and (3) restricted to men alone. Carson represents the first common attempt.[28]

Following Klaus Haacker, Carson observes that there are two feminine pronouns (πρὸς τὸ ἐπιθυμῆσαι αὐτὴν ἤδη ἐμοίχευσεν αὐτὴν) and concludes that one is unnecessary. Carson reconciles this apparent redundancy by arguing that the man in this scenario is enticing the woman to lust after him. In doing so the man commits adultery, even if the pair never acts on it. Therefore, Jesus's condemnation deals specifically with lustful flirtation rather than lustful thoughts.

There are several reasons to doubt this interpretation.[29] Grammatically, Ulrich Luz argues that this would break from Matthew's typical use of πρὸς plus the infinitive.[30] Contextually, Jesus's link between the seventh and tenth commandments equates lust with covetousness, which is an action of the heart. On Carson's view, Jesus condemns flirting, which is a level shallower than the heart level. Even so, Carson believes, "This does not weaken the force of Jesus' teaching. The heart of the matter is still lust and intent."[31] Yet it does seem to weaken Jesus's teaching since it places adultery at the point of flirtation instead of the lustful thought.

Others contend that Jesus here restricts only lustful looks directed at a married woman.[32] They do so for two reasons. First, they recognize that the tenth commandment prohibits lust directed at a neighbor's wife. Second, they observe that Jesus's teaching on adultery (Matt 5:27–30) runs directly into his teaching on divorce (Matt 5:31–32), perhaps implying a connection. Since each of these three passages (Exod 20:17 LXX; Matt 5:28, 31–32) uses the same generic word for "woman" (γυνή), and two of the passages require that this woman is married, it seems that the third would as well. Therefore, Luz concludes that Matt 5:28 "deals with intentional looking with the aim of breaking the marriage of

[27] See Jared Heath Moore, "A Biblical and Historical Appraisal of Concupiscence with Special Attention to Same-Sex Attraction" (PhD diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2019), 172–74.

[28] Carson, "Matthew," 184.

[29] Most commentators do not explicitly follow Carson's lead. Those who oppose Carson's argument include: Davies and Allison, *Matthew 1–7*, 523; Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 1–13*, WBC 33A (Dallas: Word, 1993), 120; Grant R. Osborne, *Matthew*, ZECNT 1 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 196 n. 4.

[30] Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 1–7*, trans. James E. Crouch, rev. ed., Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007), 294.

[31] Carson, "Matthew," 184.

[32] See, for instance, France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 204.

another man."[33] Prince Peters then takes this perspective to its potential conclusion: "There is nothing in the passage outside lusting after a married woman that makes a man's sexual fantasies a sin."[34]

Again, however, this interpretation is doubtful. Though both the tenth commandment and Jesus's admonition regarding divorce specifically reference married women, the present text on adultery does not. In the antitheses, Jesus routinely strips the law down to the studs, laying bare the base heart intention that precludes the visible breaking of the law. Limiting Matthew 5:28 to married women does not seem to capture the consistent severity of Jesus's demands. The rest of Scripture echoes Jesus's extreme stance on lust (Job 31:1; Rom 1:24–27).

Finally, it must be noted that the context need not limit Jesus's condemnation of lust to that of a man lusting after a woman. If we believe that the text conveys this limitation, then we would need to further specify that Jesus only condemns male heterosexual lust. Yet intuition tells us that Jesus's commands apply to both sexes. Otherwise, several antitheses earlier, we must insist that Jesus only specifies how we should reconcile with men, not women (Matt 5:23–26). Instead, we should assume that Jesus intends his words for men and women, each of whom can commit adultery and each of whom can lust (Matt 5:32).[35]

Therefore, it seems that we should not restrict Jesus's words beyond this compound truth: Any lustful look is the sin of sexual covetousness, and all lust is adultery. We may, however, be able to apply this truth more widely. For instance, Grant Osborne contends that if lusting after a woman is adultery, then certainly Jesus means to also implicate pornography.[36] Certainly, then, Jesus must also implicate lustful thoughts recalling prior looks. The presence of a woman to look at is not the issue.[37] Rather, it is the disposition of the heart that desires to take what does not belong to it.[38]

2. Matthew 5:29–30: Removing Eyes and Hands

If Matthew 5:27–28 implicates lust, Matthew 5:29–30 details the means we should employ to eliminate lust and the massive consequences if we do not. On the surface, Jesus's dual commands are easy to understand. In our efforts to eliminate lust, we should determine if any of our body parts contributes to our lust (σκανδαλίζει σε). If so, we should remove that body part lest we continue to use it in lusting. Jesus reasons that it would be relatively better to go through life maimed than to keep that

[33] Luz, *Matthew 1–7*, 294.

[34] Prince E. Peters, "Adultery as Sexual Disorder: An Exegetical Study of Matthew 5:27–30," *HTS* 78 (2022): 5.

[35] Craig L. Blomberg, *Matthew*, NAC 22 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1992), 110.

[36] Osborne, *Matthew*, 196.

[37] Though lust is often fed by visual images, lust does not require visual stimulation. A person blind from birth could still lust since lust is not by definition visual but rather an internal desire for that which is illicit. This is why many commentators locate lust in the realm of the "imagination." See Carson, "Matthew," 185; Hagner, *Matthew 1–13*, 120; Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 235.

[38] Additionally, women (and men) should draw the valid conclusion that they should dress and act in such a way that does not cause a brother (or sister) to stumble (Matt 18:16). Truly, Jesus's words place the fault squarely on the luster. They do not justify overly restrictive clothing restrictions or modesty codes. However, based on Jesus's following admonitions in Matthew 5:29–30, no woman (or man) motivated by the love of neighbor and the Christian responsibility to bear one another's burdens (Matt 22:39; Gal 6:2) should want to become something that needs to be "cut off." For a detailed Jewish and Roman background to the issue of male lust and female modesty, see Kent E. Brower, "Jesus and the Lustful Eye: Glancing at Matthew 5:28," *EvQ* 76 (2004): 291–309. Note: I do not share Brower's conclusions regarding 1 Corinthians 11 nor his belief that Jesus intends in Matthew 5:27–30 to undermine gender roles.

body part as one suffers eternal punishment. However, as with the previous section, three interpretive questions remain: (1) How do I know when I should remove my eye or my hand? (2) Why my eye and my hand? and (3) What do I accomplish by removing my eye and my hand?

2.1. How Do I Know When I Should Remove My Eye or My Hand?

If Jesus means his disciples to take drastic measures to avoid condemnation, then we seemingly should know when a body part qualifies for amputation. Thankfully, Jesus specifies that we should remove those parts that " σκανδαλίζει" us. Yet how should we understand this term?

Broadly, this term carries the sense of "causing to stumble" (so NASB, LSB, NIV).[39] We can observe this usage in the LXX, where the noun form of the word can refer to a "snare," a "trap," or a "hindrance."[40] The NT usage carries a similar sense, undoubtedly affected by the near-technical use of the term in the LXX. However, though in some cases the LXX does not place blame on the person being tripped up (e.g., Lev 19:14), in the NT the term becomes exclusively moral. In considering the 14 instances of the verb σκανδαλίζω used in Matthew alone, France argues that most picture something "catastrophic, a stumbling which deflects a person from the path of God's will and salvation (13:21; 18:6; 24:10; 26:31–33), and a 'stumbling-block' is a person or thing which gets in the way of God's saving purpose (13:41; 16:23; 18:7)."[41]

France also notes a "relatively mild sense of the verb" in Matthew (11:6; 13:57; 15:12; 17:27) yet regards these as also conveying moral complicity.[42] In these milder cases, the term denotes offense or scandal. In contemporary speech, "offense" merely indicates something external to us that repulses us. Yet in each of these so-called milder cases, the person offended chafes at Jesus's teaching or actions. They are "offended" in that they do not receive him or his message. Thus, they too sin because they reject the Messiah.[43]

"Offends" is therefore a fair translation of σκανδαλίζει in Matthew 5:29, because it conveys moral complicity on the part of the hearer (so the KJV).[44] The causes of stumbling (i.e., the eye and the hand) in Matthew 5:29, however, are complicit in the crime of lust and must be removed. This contrasts with the passages containing the term's more minor uses, in which Jesus is the cause of stumbling. Therefore, Matthew 5:29 better fits the criteria of the more severe of the two uses of σκανδαλίζει, thus requiring a stronger translation.[45]

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[39] Moisés Silva, " σκανδαλίζω," *NIDNTTE* 4:297.

[40] Silva, " σκανδαλίζω," 4:296–297.

[41] France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 205.

[42] France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 205.

[43] Silva, " σκανδαλίζω," 4:296–299.

[44] A possible allusion to this passage in Rabbinic literature may reinforce that the eye and hand here are deemed "offensive." If true, Basser believes that σκανδαλίζει would need to carry this same sense. Herbert W. Basser, "The Meaning of 'Shtuth,' Gen. R. 11 in Reference to Mt 5:29–30 and 18:8–9," *NTS* 31 (1985): 148–51.

[45] John Cornell points out that typically scandal refers to "interpersonal antagonism." In other words, the scandal is usually related to another person which leaves us scandalized. He builds on this observation to interpret this passage as a kind of comedy. Jesus means us to find it absurd that we would blame our body parts for our lust (they scandalize us), treating them as if they are our enemies. While his observation regarding scandal is true in other contexts, it is foreign to the current context and therefore cannot justify his interpretation of this passage. John F. Cornell, "Anatomy of Scandal: Self-Dismemberment in the Gospel of Matthew and in Gogol's 'The Nose,'" *Literature and Theology* 16 (2002): 270–90.

For this reason, the best translation of σκανδαλίζει in Matthew 5:29 is something like "cause to sin" (ESV, CSB, NET)[46] or "lead into sin."[47] This highlights that Jesus identifies the eye and hand as the culprits; therefore, they must be removed. One problem with these translations, however, is that "cause" or "lead" may seem to absolve the luster of at least some guilt. Yet Jesus does not allow this possibility. Already, he has emphatically declared that the person who lusts has sinned without allowing for any exceptions. Additionally, he makes clear that the person who does not part with that which causes him to sin will find himself in hell. The NLT makes this contextual connection most explicit: "So if your eye—even your good eye—causes you to lust…"

Therefore, based on this translation of σκανδαλίζει, I conclude that the occasion for Jesus's dual command in Matthew 5:29–30 is the point at which a person becomes aware that his or her eye or hand is partnering or could partner with the person in lusting. However, this does not answer all our questions. What about the eye and the hand cause a person to sin? How do they do so? The answers to these are explored next.

2.2. Why My Eye and My Hand?

Having established that certain bodily members may partner with an individual in lusting, I turn my attention to the members themselves. To understand Matthew 5:29–30 properly, interpreters must determine why Jesus included these body parts instead of others, such as the leg, mouth, or spleen. Many conclude that, given the context and most readers' general intuition, the eye and the hand have some particular connection to sexual sin that the spleen does not.

Regarding the eye, Carson believes its inclusion is evident, given that it is "the member of the body most commonly blamed for leading us astray, especially in sexual sins."[48] Hagner adds that lust is only made possible through sight, an act that necessitates an eye.[49] Some, however, also find sexual connotations in the hand. Allison believes that "hand" refers euphemistically to "onanism" (i.e., masturbation).[50] In other words, Jesus would have us cut off our hand if by our hand we inflame or externalize lust. Carson goes further, indicating that "hand" probably refers to "the male sexual organ."[51] In this case, Jesus would have us take the most extreme measures if necessary. Additionally, Osborne believes that Jesus means not only to stress the complicity of eye and hand in lust but also to illustrate a pathway and progression. Lust begins in the eye but ultimately consummates through the hand.[52]

Yet other passages apart from Matthew 5:27–30 could suggest that "eye" and "hand" do not carry sexual connotations. Jesus references the eye at several other points in the Sermon on the Mount, yet in these cases the eye illustrates revenge (5:38), greed (6:22–23), and proper judgment (7:3). Later in Matthew, Jesus draws on the same imagery of removing hands and eyes (18:7–9). Yet he also adds the foot, and the context is not specifically lust but rather general temptation and the possibility of being a temptation to others (cf. Mark 9:42–47). So, it seems that Jesus routinely utilized the same imagery

[46] BDAG, s.v. " σκανδαλίζω."

[47] Silva, " σκανδαλίζω," 4:297.

[48] Carson, "Matthew," 184.

[49] Hagner, *Matthew 1–13*, 120.

[50] Davies and Allison, *Matthew 1–7*, 525. Also McKnight, *Sermon on the Mount*, 89.

[51] Carson, "Matthew," 185. Others, however, explicitly deny that Jesus instructs men to cut off their genitals. See I. J. Du Plessis, "The Ethics of Marriage According to Matt. 5:27–32," *Neot* 1 (1967): 22.

[52] Osborne, *Matthew*, 196. Also David L. Turner, *Matthew*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 170–71.

to provoke others to consider the severity with which they should battle temptation.[53] Therefore, since the basic imagery does not necessarily carry sexual overtones, context would need to indicate what overtones Jesus intends.[54]

The context of Matthew 5:27–30, however, strongly suggests these sexual overtones. Primarily, Jesus tightly connects lust with the eye ("everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent"), indicating that his reference to the eye is not incidental. Additionally, as many have noted, the hand is a member with a particular ability to engage in sexual sin. The possibility that Jesus intends this connection between eye, hand, and sexual sin becomes stronger when we notice that he ignores the foot. By not mirroring his phraseology in Matthew 18:7–9 and Mark 9:42–47, Jesus in Matthew 5:29–30 may be drawing attention to the individual members.[55]

Finally, we should also ask why Jesus stresses the "right" member in both cases. To some, Jesus repeats the term simply to "enhance the parallelism" between the two phrases (5:29 and 5:30), thus binding them together.[56] However, most attempt to show that Jesus's contemporaries would have universally understood that the "right" is of greater value than the "left."[57] If this is true, then Jesus means to stress the seriousness with which we should battle lust. Even our most valued body parts should be eligible for the chopping block.

So, then, why does Jesus reference the eye and hand? It seems that he means the physical eye and hand. These parts are "touchpoints" between the lust in our inner selves and external temptation. They are a "means" or "occasion" by which our outer selves externalize lust, bringing the lust in our hearts to fruition.[58] They are also fodder for lust, feeding and inflaming lust. Yet the latter of these two uses is primarily in view here. While eyes and hands and any number of body parts allow us to *externalize* lust, moving from lust to adultery, Jesus's logic works backward. In the present passage, Jesus teaches us to consider external *causes* of lust (i.e., touchpoints with temptation) and to remove them. Regardless of the intricacies of how Matthew imagined the eye and hand might cause one to lust, his point is that they might. Therefore, Matthew 5:27–30 teaches that we should eliminate that which *inflames* lust. In doing so, we tamp down lust, not simply minimize its opportunity to show itself.

2.3. What Do I Accomplish by Removing My Eye or Hand?

If the eye and the hand summarize various external touchpoints between lust and temptation, what exactly does eliminating them accomplish? In the previous section, I introduced my argument that

[53] I use the term "temptation" throughout the paper to refer to external trials. The Greek root behind the term we translate in English as "temptation" (πειρασμός) can sometimes carry the sense of "test" (Matt 4:1), and often the translation reflects this meaning (Jas 1:2). Since Jesus experienced this kind of temptation, others who experience the same are not sinning. Other times, however, πειρασμός refers to a kind of temptation for which the one tempted is morally culpable. I group this latter kind of temptation into the category of lust since it is said to arise from our sinful desires (ἐπιθυμία).

[54] Alternatively, Will Deming argues that Matthew 5:29–30 and Mark 9:42–47 share in being influenced by a particular Jewish text with sexual content. If true, Mark removed the sexual content while Matthew retained it. Will Deming, "Mark 9:42–10:12, Matthew 5:27–32, and B. Nid. 13b: A First Century Discussion of Male Sexuality," *NTS* 36 (1990): 130–41.

[55] France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 205.

[56] Davies and Allison, *Matthew 1–7*, 524.

[57] See, for example, France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 205; Hagner, *Matthew 1–13*, 121.

[58] Turner, *Matthew*, 170–71; Aquinas, *Commentary on the Gospel of St. Matthew*, 196.

eliminating touchpoints with lust helps kill lust, while allowing these touchpoints to remain inflames lust. I will now unpack this argument.

To begin, we must address the commands in Matthew 5:29–30. As I have argued above, Jesus teaches that some body parts may cause one to sin. His demanded response allows no caveat or compromise. In the case of the eye, we must "tear it out" (ἔξελε). If the problem lies in the hand, we must "cut it off" (ἔκκοψον). These two terms, though different, convey virtually identical meanings. This is evidenced by the parallelism between Matthew 5:29 and 5:30. Both terms denote destruction and total loss (ἀπόληται). In both situations, the member is unceremoniously removed and thrown away (βάλε ἀπὸ σοῦ).

Yet despite Jesus's clarity, opinions vary widely on how to apply his teaching. Luz observes that this passage's history of interpretation runs on two tracks, what I will call the "radical" and the "reasonable" track.[59] The radical track aims to respect the severe nature of Jesus's commands. In doing so, this first track has been known to widen the application of Jesus's command so much that an aversion to anything sexual and perhaps even material develops. In other words, if we are to remove that which could lead us into lust, then perhaps our body or sex itself is the problem (e.g., Origen's fateful decision, priestly vows of chastity, asceticism, and a hesitancy surrounding even married sexual attraction in certain church fathers).[60]

Most modern interpreters running on the radical track continue to recognize the loftiness of Jesus's commands, though in general without the same tendency to implicate sex itself. To battle lust, Jesus demands that we "go to the limit,"[61] taking "decisive"[62] and "drastic"[63] action to "deal radically"[64] with that which tempts us, "eliminating them at all costs."[65] In other words, most recognize that Jesus commands us to take extreme measures to eliminate touchpoints with lust. However, most of these same commentators also run on a parallel, though seemingly contradictory track. This second, "reasonable" track aims to make the text readily applicable to daily life.

Many are quick to point out one apparent incongruity between Jesus's commands and the results of our literal obedience. In our zeal to kill lust, we may find ourselves with one fewer hand but still full of lust. Quarles therefore concludes that we should not apply Jesus's commands literally since we would still be able to sin with our left hand.[66] Further, even literal obedience might betray a hypocritical heart desirous of a quick fix. Carson reasons that even emasculation "is not radical enough, since lust is not thereby removed."[67] In other words, most conclude that we should maintain the force of Jesus's command yet deny its immediate application.

[59] Luz, *Matthew 1–7*, 292–94.

[60] "If a man marries in order to have children he ought to practice self-control. He ought not to have a sexual desire even for his wife, to whom he has a duty to show Christian love. He ought to produce children by a reverent, disciplined act of will." Clement of Alexandria, *Stromateis, Books One to Three*, trans. John Ferguson (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America, 1991), 292.

[61] Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 235.

[62] Bruner, *Matthew 1–12*, 223.

[63] Hagner, *Matthew 1–13*, 121.

[64] Carson, "Matthew," 185.

[65] France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 206.

[66] Charles L. Quarles, *Sermon on The Mount: Restoring Christ's Message to the Modern Church*, ed. E. Ray Clendenen, NACSBT 11 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2011), 120.

[67] Carson, "Matthew," 184. Also Keener, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 188. Christy Gambrell gives two additional incongruities. First, to obey literally, if consistent, might require us to cut out our hearts, since that is the ultimate location of our lust (Matt 5:28). Second, the Law prohibited self-harm (Lev 19:28). While Jesus fulfills the Law, he

This presents a problem. How should we take Jesus's commands if not literally? In surveying the literature on Matthew 5:27–30, I have noted that interpreters understand Jesus's commands in one or more of the following ways: hyperbole, symbolism, or hypothetical.[68] These categories overlap greatly, and all capture some aspect of Jesus's intention. However, I conclude that to best understand Jesus's commands we should view them as hypothetical.

2.3.1. Hyperbole

"Hyperbole" seems to be the most common way of understanding Jesus's commands in Matthew 5:29–30. Many use the word "hyperbole,"[69] while others add or instead use the related words "exaggeration"[70] or "metaphor."[71] In every case, they mean the same thing: Jesus does not intend anyone to tear out one's eye or cut off one's hand. Most arrive here by reasoning that since sin begins inwardly, Jesus cannot mean that we may exterminate sin through external means.[72] Turner declares: "It should go without saying that these two commands are hyperbolic."[73] On this view, Jesus uses hyperbole to "shock" his hearers into seriously pursuing holiness.[74] However, those who view this text hyperbolically still tether the most immediate application to temptations toward lust.

2.3.2. Symbolism

Others prefer to describe this passage as "symbolic." In many ways, symbolism is similar to hyperbole. Those who view Matthew 5:27–30 as primarily symbolism, however, are set apart by their willingness to apply the principles in the text more widely.[75] For instance, Pennington believes readers

does not set himself in opposition to the Law. Christy Gambrell, "Does Jesus Condone Self-Mutilation in Matthew 5:29–30?" *Christian Research Journal* 41 (2018): 8–9.

[68] One unique, minority alternative sees sarcasm in Jesus's commands. On this view, Jesus lampoons his listeners based on their unstated assumptions. After teaching them that lust itself is adultery, he expects that they will protest. How could anyone avoid lust if we can continue to see? So then, in commanding them to tear out their eye, he means to poke fun at them. He expects them to become offended, thus exposing that they still assume sin originates and terminates in the body. Therefore, on this view, Jesus does not intend his followers to act on Matthew 5:29–30. Instead, he uses these "commands" to recenter his followers back on Matthew 5:27–28. This view, however, does not respect Jesus's logic in Matthew 5:29–30 nor how seriously he warns those who ignore it. Jesus says, If you lust, and if your eye or hand are the cause, then lose the body part to avoid hell. His appeal to avoiding hell with body intact makes no sense if he does not intend his hearers to contemplate whether they might avoid that fate by parting with one of their members. Cornell, "Anatomy of Scandal," 271.

[69] Hagner, *Matthew 1–13*, 121; Turner, *Matthew*, 171.

[70] France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 205; McKnight, *Sermon on the Mount*, 89.

[71] Osborne, *Matthew*, 195; Keener, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 187; Blomberg, *Matthew*, 109.

[72] Llewelyn and Robinson argue literarily. They believe that Matthew uses various words "metonymically," therefore signaling to his readers that when he says one thing he intends to reference another. They argue that Matthew equates "eye," "sight," and "desire;" therefore, when Matthew exhorts disciples to tear out their eyes, he means them only to remove their sources of desire. It is far from obvious, however, that Matthew intends this metonymy in the text. Instead, Matthew references all three terms in relation to one another, not as equals. He says, "If your sight leads you into lust, cut off the source of the sight." Stephen Robert Llewelyn and William Robinson, "'If Your Hand Causes You to Stumble, Cut It Off': Questions Over the Figurative Nature of Mark 9:43–47 and Its Synoptic Parallels," *NovT* 63 (2021): 425–51.

[73] Turner, *Matthew*, 171.

[74] Turner, *Matthew*, 171.

[75] Luz seems to pit the hyperbolic against the symbolic. He entertains the hyperbolic interpretation but eliminates it due to the presence of δεξιός. To him, Jesus's emphasis is on giving up what is most precious, symbolized

should take this passage "allegorically or figuratively," which allows for the principle to be applied to essentially all thoughts, people, or other church members that might lead us into any kind of sin.[76] This follows Aquinas, who allowed that this passage might be applied to false teachers, bad company, bad ideas, over-contemplation, laziness, or even works done with good intentions yet which come with strong temptations.[77] The only interpretation he prohibits is the "corporeal" interpretation.[78] Otherwise, no part of us would remain, for there is "no member of the body which may not scandalize."[79] Thus, for some, Jesus does not intend to describe strategies for battling lust at all. Therefore, viewing Jesus's words in this passage symbolically allows us to focus on Jesus's aim "with no particular interest in distinguishing between strategies that relate to the inner life, the physical body, or the arrangement of the external circumstances of life."[80]

2.3.3. Hypothetical

Finally, Quarles commends respecting that Jesus means to be taken literally, even if the situation he describes is hypothetical.[81] In other words, if our eye or hand truly was the cause of sin, Jesus would have us remove it.[82] Thankfully, this will never be necessary, as those who view this text hyperbolically or symbolically will agree. Surely in every case a disciple could find a less violent solution to the problem of lust, such as removing oneself from tempting situations, looking away, gaining accountability, or seeking God's help when temptation seems unavoidable (Matt 6:13). Yet to describe Jesus's commands as "hypothetical" seeks to respect both the radical and reasonable nature of Jesus's commands. Jesus wants us to consider everything in our lives that causes us to lust and to eliminate it. We should be willing to part with anything, even our physical members. When wisdom dictates that we should forcibly remove something from our lives, we should do so expediently.

Therefore, only a hypothetical reading allows the reader to run on both the radical and reasonable track without contradiction. Surely Jesus is speaking hyperbolically and symbolically. Yet the terms "hyperbole" or "symbolism" and the way many interpreters use these or related terms somewhat undermine the radical nature of Jesus's commands in an effort to be reasonable. "Hyperbole" prioritizes 5:27–28 over 5:29–30. It moves too quickly away from the content of the commands toward how we can reasonably apply these principles to lust without considering how the content of the commands might give us clues. "Symbolism" prioritizes 5:29–30 over 5:27–28. It threatens to move the most immediate application away from the central idea in the text, distracting from the text's focus on lust. Yet viewing Jesus's commands as "hypothetical" requires that we let Jesus's commands land first before removing

by the "right," to avoid judgment. Through this interpretation, Luz rids this passage of any sexual or physical applications, something Luz intends. Luz, *Matthew 1–7*, 297–98.

[76] Jonathan T. Pennington, *The Sermon on the Mount and Human Flourishing: A Theological Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2017), 188.

[77] Aquinas, *Commentary on the Gospel of St. Matthew*, 197–98.

[78] Aquinas, *Commentary on the Gospel of St. Matthew*, 196.

[79] Aquinas, *Commentary on the Gospel of St. Matthew*, 196.

[80] Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 239.

[81] Quarles, *Sermon on The Mount*, 122.

[82] The Mishnah seems to support this view in its requirement that a man who uses his hand for personal sexual arousal should have the hand cut off, even if we have no recorded instances of this being carried out. Nolland, however, sees the Mishnah as occurring in a different context and therefore unable to inform Matthew 5:29–30. In particular, the Mishnah describes a corporate, legal punishment as opposed to an individual self-maiming for the purposes of discipleship. Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 238–39.

their sting. A hypothetical reading will conclude that if our eye or hand were in some way responsible for lust and there was no other way to avoid lust, we should be willing to go through the rest of our lives with one of each. Yet this will never be necessary, since we will always be able to find more effective means of cutting off external means of engaging in sexual sin.

To summarize, most recognize that Jesus in Matthew 5:29–30 demands that his followers take extreme action to eliminate touchpoints between lust and temptation. Yet some move quickly to qualify the severity of Jesus's commands while others loosen the tight connection between the commands and lust. The problem is not that we qualify these commands. Otherwise, Christian obedience would require mutilation. Instead, the problem comes from attempting to qualify too quickly while still hoping to maintain the force of Jesus's commands. In doing so, we miss the mechanism by which Matthew 5:29–30 affects 5:27–30; we fail to answer the question: If lust occurs in the heart, yet temptations are external, *how* does eliminating external temptations diminish lust? If we adopt a hypothetical view of Matthew 5:29–30, then we can coherently merge both the "radical" and "reasonable" tracks. On this view, we will rightly and ruthlessly cut off external sources of temptation, willing even to dismember, yet always finding more effective means of cutting off sin.

3. Implications of Matthew 5:27–30

Jesus's teaching on lust occurs in two parts. In the first (Matt 5:27–28), Jesus teaches that adultery finds its root in lust. Lust occurs inwardly and begins at the moment when we desire that which externally tempts us.[83] In the second part (Matt 5:29–30), Jesus details how one should respond to external temptations. Jesus requires that we remove any touchpoint between lust and temptation that might inflame desire and cause us to stumble. He singles out the eye and hand because of their specialty in inflaming lust.

Therefore, I conclude that the second statement (Matt 5:29–30) is the means by which we obey the first (Matt 5:27–28). Jesus assumes that our lust itself will diminish if we obey him by removing touchpoints with lust. These touchpoints are not mere externalizations of our inward lust; otherwise, we could not expect to affect our inner self through outward means. Instead, Jesus teaches us that the outer self has the power to change the inner self. Lust indeed occurs in the heart. Yet Jesus's commands only make sense if our outer self can either inflame or tamp down lust. Following Jesus's logic, if we were to remove our touchpoints with lust we would diminish lust, as evidenced by our subsequent avoidance of hell. Conversely, if we were to allow our touchpoints with lust to remain, then we can expect to be thrown into hell, apparently for our lust.

These conclusions fit with the emphasis on the whole person seen throughout the Sermon on the Mount. In particular, Jesus pits his ways against that of the "hypocrites," whose inward disposition and

[83] Someone might cite James 1:13–15 to question whether all illicit desire is sinful. This passage seems to teach this progression: first, the kind of temptation that arises from illicit desire, then sin, then death. Therefore, rather than saying that illicit desire *is* sin, should we not instead say that illicit desire *leads to* sin? In response, we should note that the word for desire (ἐπιθυμία) in James 1:14–15 is the same as lust in Matthew 5:28 and carries the same negative connotation. Previously, I argued that lust is sexual covetousness. James also links illicit desire to covetousness (Jas 4:2). Therefore, James already assumes that the desire that gives rise to our internal temptations is covetous and therefore sinful. The progression in James 1:13–15, however, shows that sinful, illicit desire becomes more morally culpable and detrimental the more one inflames that desire. Therefore, as I have argued thus far, we should seek to limit the opportunities we give to our desires to drag us further down the path leading to death.

outward display lack alignment (Matt 6:1–21). Pennington sees this emphasis summarized in Jesus's call to be "perfect" (5:48), which is less a summons to moral perfection and more to integrated wholeness.[84]

Consequently, how we understand this passage has massive ramifications for the way we battle sin. If our outer self can help or hinder our sanctification, then we should deal ruthlessly with that which tempts us, knowing that *this will truly help us*. Of course, we cannot attend to the outer self and neglect the inner self. Hilary acknowledges that "when pervasive concupiscence is manifest, the loss of the body is superfluous since the impulse of the will remains."[85] Yet he recognizes that "the cutting-off of a member is useful if there is an indictment of the heart."[86] In other words, an internet filter will not help people committed to their lust. Yet a person committed to Christ with a strong desire to hate sin can and should apply an internet filter if he or she finds that the open internet is a temptation. Further, he or she should expect that this internet filter will truly help him or her to lust less.[87] This in turn will create more advantageous circumstances for the person to go about the most necessary work of inward heart change.

Two other examples might further illustrate this point. First, we should not be surprised if consuming sexually provocative media increases our lust. Many Christians regularly and casually observe titillating media content. If they observed these same situations in real flesh and blood standing in front of them, they would avert their eyes. Yet their consciences are not pricked because they are viewing it on a screen. Jesus warns, however, that consuming this content will lead to heart adultery and implores us to take the same extreme measures to eliminate it as we would toward that which tempts us toward physical adultery. Second, we will fail to consistently win the war against lust if we fail to address the outer man. Those seeking counsel for lust should rightly hear that their primary problem is heart-level idolatry. Yet those offering counsel should not divorce this counsel directed at the inner self from Jesus's call to attend to the outer self. These practical considerations are not somehow unspiritual but are merciful and necessary aids toward sanctification. Sanctification looks like repenting of lust, bathing in Scripture, and applying an internet filter.

4. Conclusion

If adultery refers to the physical, sexual act, then lust refers to the heart-level issue that eventually grows into adultery. Lust is the seed; adultery is the tree. External temptation, therefore, is the water, sun, and fertilizer. In Matthew 5:27–30, Jesus teaches us to eliminate touchpoints with external sexual temptation. Jesus expects that when we do so, we will diminish lust rather than simply eliminate opportunities for lust to manifest. Therefore, this passage teaches that while lust occurs in the inner self, controlling our outer self is a means by which we may dampen lust. Jesus calls believers to eliminate external means of introducing sin internally, even if that external means is something precious.

[84] Pennington, *The Sermon on the Mount and Human Flourishing*, 203–6.

[85] St Hilary of Poitiers, *Commentary on Matthew*, trans. D. H. Williams (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America, 2012), 69.

[86] St Hilary of Poitiers, *Commentary on Matthew*, 69.

[87] Martyn Lloyd-Jones links this passage to the biblical idea of mortification, famously extrapolated by John Owen. Mortification is not cutting off our hands, because sin does not dwell in our physical members. Mortification, however, does involve our physical members. While sin does not reside in them, they are the means by which we externalize sin. Therefore, they should be "brought into subjection" (Rom 8:13; 13:14; 1 Cor 9:27; Col 3:5). See D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Studies in the Sermon on the Mount*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971), 218–21.

Therefore, internet filters, accountability groups, and perhaps even avoidance of certain people, places, or media are not simply methods by which we shun opportunities to externalize lust;[88] these practices serve to diminish lust: limiting the water, sun, and fertilizer that help lust thrive. If we expand the application beyond sexual sin, we find the same principle at play. My desire to over-indulge increases when delicious food is within reach. I am far more likely to covet tools I do not need when I am at a hardware store. In both situations, when I remove the source of desire, the desire decreases. My capacity for illicit desire remains, but this is not the same as saying that I am just as covetous when I am not coveting. It matters what we do, and what we do influences what we want. Therefore, according to Matthew 5:27–30, if my right hand causes me to sin, I should prefer to learn to write left-handed. However, in every case, I should instead be able to simply remove that at which I grasp.

[88] Recognizing that some may chafe at the thought of avoiding salacious or even mildly tempting media if by doing so they may be seen as an uncultured "ignoramus," Lloyd-Jones responds: "Our Lord's reply is that, for the sake of your soul, you had better be an ignoramus, if you know it does harm to know these things." Lloyd-Jones, *Studies in the Sermon on the Mount*, 220.

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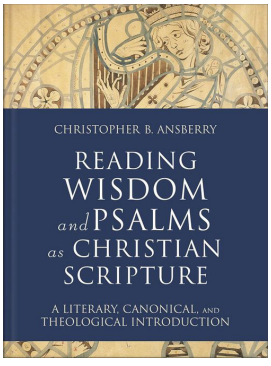
— OLD TESTAMENT —

Christopher B. Ansberry. *Reading Wisdom and Psalms as Christian Scripture: A Literary, Canonical, and Theological Introduction*. Reading Christian Scripture. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2024. x + 227 pp. £31.99/$36.99.



"Faith seeking understanding"—this motto by Saint Anselm guides Christopher B. Ansberry in his accessible and theologically rich textbook on the wisdom literature, the Song of Songs, and the Psalms. Each of these books contributes to the Christian pursuit of faith seeking understanding in a distinctive and poetically mediated way:

> Proverbs inculcates fear seeking understanding. Job stages a performance of suffering seeking understanding. Ecclesiastes exemplifies finitude seeking understanding. The Song depicts desires seeking understanding. The Psalter attunes the life of faith in accord with praise seeking understanding. (p. 2)

The treatment of these books follows a basic pattern. In a first chapter, the author outlines introductory issues pertaining to each book, such as content and structure, genre and literary characteristics, or interpretive issues. In one or two further chapters, he dives deep into theological topics occurring in the book. The main text is supplemented by a significant number of sidebars in different categories (literary notes, historical matters, canonical connections, theological issues, reception history, and philosophical issues).

In his chapters on the book of Proverbs (chs. 2–4), Ansberry demonstrates that character formation is the main goal of the sages. The collections are arranged in a way that stirs the moral reasoning of the reader and nurtures a life of wisdom and virtue. Each theological theme within the book of Proverbs promotes the underlying assumption that the good life is only possible by becoming "fearers of Yahweh" (p. 18). This means that, by understanding their dependence on Yahweh, the wise live a "life in relationship with Yahweh and in accord with the grain of Yahweh's good creation" (p. 33).

The book of Job (chs. 5–7) seeks to answer two key questions: (1) "Is disinterested piety possible?" and (2) "Is the retribution principle a suitable policy for God's governance of the world?" (p. 52). Within the course of the book, it becomes clear that God does not govern the world through a "mechanical system of retribution and reward" but by his wisdom, and that while "the world is ordered, … it is also unsafe" (p. 53). Due to the limitations and finitude of human beings, divine justice and wisdom are not fully accessible to them. Trying to navigate the vicissitudes of life, the God-fearer Job directly approaches God with his questions and laments, expecting his vindication.

In the chapters about Ecclesiastes (chs. 8–9), Ansberry introduces the "philosophical trinity" (ontology/anthropology, epistemology, and axiology/ethics) as "frames of reference for exploring a central question posed by Qoheleth: What does it mean to be a creature in this world?" (p. 99). Humans need to understand that they are dependent on the Creator, that they only possess "provisional knowledge" (p. 113), and that God is the source of all good. With all this in mind, both the elusiveness and the joys of this life can be received with gratitude.

In his explanations of the Song of Songs (chs. 10–11), Ansberry suggests interpreting it in both a literal-historical way as a human love song and a theological way as a divine-human love song. Readers are invited to understand this biblical book with Genesis 1–3 in mind—as an Edenic vision of love as well as a theological vision of reconciliation between God and his people.

The Psalms (chs. 12–13) model diverse ways in which humans navigate life with all its questions before their covenant God. Through both the genres of the individual psalms and the design of the entire anthology, the psalms express the nature of the life of faith within the capacious experiences of life and nourish the prayers' theological imagination for their spiritual pilgrimage. The different voices create "a theo-logic, showing who God is in himself as well as who God is in relationship" (p. 172).

Ansberry provides his readers with an engaging and fascinating, yet also theologically reflected and academically up-to-date, introduction to these five poetic books. His canonical perspective invites the readers to interpret the different voices of wisdom as complementary rather than contradictory, leaving the reader with a sense of awe in light of the complexity and theologically permeated nature of life. He manages to introduce rather intricate theological concepts (i.e., divine impassibility) and philosophical ideas (i.e., virtue ethics) in a concise and accessible way, letting the readers experience the depth and beauty of these biblical texts. Furthermore, Ansberry offers helpful (hermeneutical) guidelines and illuminative theological perspectives on reading this material from a Christian viewpoint.

However, besides these altogether impressive qualities of this book, there are a few minor shortcomings. First, Ansberry's hermeneutical method is not entirely transparent. For example, when referring to ancient Near Eastern texts to explain biblical concepts, it is not clear what exegetical significance these materials have. Second, while the theological depth of his presentation broadens the reader's mind, occasionally Ansberry jumps too quickly from "the basics" of Bible survey to discussions of abstract theological themes. Third, sometimes the selection and structure of the material is elusive. As a reader, it is difficult to follow the logic or overarching train of thought within each section. This observation also relates to the length of his treatments. For example, readers might wonder why the long book of Psalms is presented in only two chapters.

All in all, however, this textbook is an excellent introduction, enhancing the readers' literary overview, theological understanding, and canonical perspectives of these books. I would highly recommend it.

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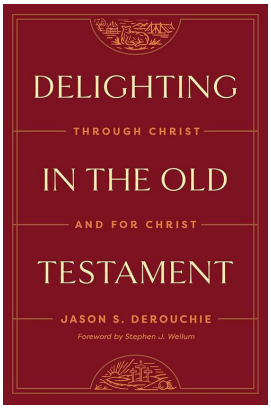
Jason S. DeRouchie. *Delighting in the Old Testament: Through Christ and for Christ*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2024. xxvii + 337 pp. £23.99/$32.99.



Dr. Jason S. DeRouchie is the Research Professor of Old Testament and Biblical Theology and Judy Hastings Endowed Chair of Old Testament Studies at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. His new book, *Delighting in the Old Testament*, comprehensively and pastorally seeks "to help Christians make connections to Christ and practical application to the Christian life from every page of the Old Testament" (p. 1).

The work unfolds into four parts. Part 1 ("Reading Well: How Jesus Helps Christians Interpret the Old Testament") lays the biblical-theological foundations for an OT Christian hermeneutic, demonstrating that the OT was written *for Christians* and faith in Christ and Christ's historical work of salvation supply the necessary light and lens for seeing, understanding, and applying the Old Testament (pp. 16–17).

Part 2 ("Seeing Well: How Jesus's Bible Testifies about Him") lays out a multiform approach to a Christian hermeneutic of the OT (p. 72). DeRouchie explains the Bible's historical-salvation framework in terms of covenantal progression: *Adamic/Noahic* > *Abrahamic* > *Mosaic* > *Davidic* > *New* (p. 78). A Christian hermeneutic of the OT should place messianic predictions, typologies, and old covenant (OC) ethics within the appropriate phases of the covenantal progression. DeRouchie concludes part 2 by using Genesis as a case study.

Part 3 ("Hoping Well: How Jesus Secures Every Divine Promise") takes 2 Corinthians 1:20 and argues that *every* OT promise for *every* believer is "Yes" in Christ, addressing popular prosperity appropriations of OT promises and contrasting them with NT uses of the OT. Part 3 concludes with DeRouchie's "Lens of Christ" diagram, which will be explained below.

Part 4 ("Living Well: How Jesus Makes Moses's Law matter") argues that "the Mosaic law does not *directly* bind the Christian in a legal manner"; on the contrary, Christians "treat the Old Testament laws as profitable and instructive when [they] read them through the lens of Christ" (p. 193). DeRouchie grounds this conclusion using the hermeneutical methods of parts 1–3, using them to interact with the OT roots of Christian Reconstructionism and Christian Nationalism.

Readers may find DeRouchie's "lens" of Christ most helpful, which visually shows how various OT laws and promises are either maintained, transformed, or annulled in the new covenant (NC). Some promises and laws persist between the OC and NC without change (e.g., adultery), though their required consequences may differ between the covenants; some are transformed (e.g., Sabbath Day); and some are completely annulled (e.g., unclean food). This taxonomy provides a more organic link between the OC's relation to the NC than the traditional tripartite division (see pp. 213–28) by taking the Mosaic Law *in its entirety* and demonstrating how Christ's historical work impacts various OC laws.

Despite the strength of DeRouchie's "lens of Christ," he inadvertently grounds his dichotomy of "the law of Christ" and the Mosaic Law with a fallacy. First, DeRouchie writes, "As a written legal code, not one of the 613 stipulations in the Mosaic law-covenant is directly binding on Christians…. Instead, we are bound by the law of Christ (1 Cor 9:20–21; Gal 6:2), which is summarized in the call to love our neighbor" (p. 199). DeRouchie then cites James 1:25; 2:8; and 2:12 as a summary of the law of Christ.

James 2:8 records, "If you really fulfill the royal law *according to the Scripture* (γράφη), 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself' [Lev. 19:18 LXX], you are doing well." Immediately following this quotation, DeRouchie writes, "Today, the direct authority for guiding Christians is not Moses's instructions but Christ's words through his apostles" (p. 200; cf. p. 227).

James implies that *Scripture* (γράφη) is the OT and that the Levitical command "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Lev 19:18 LXX, verbatim) is itself "the perfect law," "the law of liberty," and "the royal law." Although Jesus and Paul widely apply Leviticus 19:18 as a summary of the Mosaic Law's requirements (Matt 19:19; 22:39; Mark 12:31; Rom 13:9; Gal 5:14; Jas 2:8), DeRouchie's law of Christ / law of Moses dichotomy is not warranted *on the basis of this text*, because DeRouchie's very definition of "the law of Christ" is itself a distinct Mosaic law (Lev. 19:18)—one of the 613 Mosaic stipulations. DeRouchie's conclusion (the Mosaic Law is not binding for Christians) fundamentally denies the premise (Lev 19:18 [Jas 2:8] is the law of Christ).

DeRouchie's own "lens of Christ" solves the problem because this particular law (Lev 19:18) is better seen as a law *maintained without extension* (see pp. 208–9)—a universal law applicable to both OC and NC believers, commanded in the Old and enabled in the New. Thus, Leviticus 19:18 seen in James 2:8 is not only a summary of the law of Christ but also of *one particular OT law* that remains binding for Christians today.

Readers of DeRouchie will immediately perceive a pastor-professor at work. Despite the forceful critique above, DeRouchie's overall case is compelling, and his fiery love for seeing Christ in the Old Testament is infectious. This reviewer heartily recommends *Delighting in the Old Testament: Through Christ and for Christ*.

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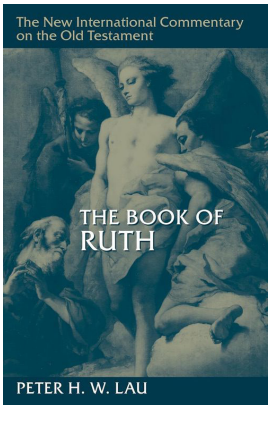
Peter H. W. Lau. *The Book of Ruth.* New International Commentary on the Old Testament. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2023. xxxiii + 342 pp. £40.00/$48.00.



Peter Lau has written an exemplary commentary on the book of Ruth in the NICOT series. It provides a translation and explanation of Ruth, thoroughly interacting with the relevant scholarly literature (making judicious use of footnotes) without losing the thread of the story or getting bogged down in tortuous scholarly debates. It points out the book's literary sophistication and shows how these literary features contribute to meaning and enhance the reading experience. It treats Ruth in its biblical-theological context, seeing fruitful connections across the Christian canon. It is theologically astute, makes relevant cultural observations (ancient and modern), and provides pertinent remarks on contemporary application (e.g., responding to immigrants). It is written in an engaging and accessible style.

The introduction begins with a discussion of structure and genre. Lau treats the book "as a historiographical document, crafted with literary artistry and weighted with ethical and theological implications" (p. 11). Concerning issues of authorship and date, both of which are uncertain,

Lau favors a monarchic date (p. 19). While some favor a Persian date for the book because of the issue of marriage to non-Israelites, Lau notes the issue is different in that in this later period marriage is to non-believing foreign women, whereas Ruth is a believer (p. 19). Lau proposes that the primary purpose of the book was "*to present God's providence and kindness in preserving the family that produced King David*" (p. 28, italics original). Furthermore, he is convinced that, as a historical narrative, the book serves an ethical purpose: "*God's unceasing providence and kindness encourage his people to follow a lifestyle of kindness*" (p. 29, italics original). Key theological themes in Ruth that the commentary discusses include God's providence and human action, the cycle of divine-human kindness, blessing and covenant, application of the law, identity (non-Israelite and Israelite), the Davidic dynasty, mission, and redemption.

Lau divides the book into four acts of three scenes, with each act comprising a chapter of Ruth. He demonstrates an overall chiastic structure to the book, though the plot is linear. The commentary follows each of the scenes, treating them as units, with many of the units also exhibiting a chiastic structure. In each unit, Lau provides an overview of literary context, a translation (his own), textual and translation notes, a discussion of structure, then exegetical comments, usually verse by verse, which make up the bulk of the commentary. There is also often a review at the end of each scene and thoughts on contemporary application, especially at the end of each chapter of Ruth. Hebrew is transliterated which allows those without Hebrew to see some of the stylistic devices, such as alliteration. There is also a bibliography, an index of authors, an index of subjects, and an index of Scripture and other ancient texts.

In the space available in this review, I will comment on just a few features of the commentary. First, Lau's detailed translation notes. Ruth is often one of the first books that Hebrew students will translate, and Lau's notes will prove valuable to them. What I found interesting here was his literary explanations for what many have considered grammatical and syntactical "problems." For instance, there are ten occasions where pronoun genders do not match the noun, with seven spoken by Naomi, and none by Ruth or Boaz. Lau comments: "I lean toward a stylistic explanation for the mismatches to mark out Naomi as from the older generation. Interestingly, Ruth the Moabite speaks in regular Hebrew. Perhaps this functions to render her more attractive to original hearers; at least it lowers one barrier for her acceptance" (p. 80).

Second, Lau highlights issues of honour and shame in ancient Israelite society and provides very helpful insights into how these issues play out in the narrative. While he makes these observations throughout the book, they are especially useful in viewing Ruth's interaction with Boaz at the threshing floor in chapter 3 and for unravelling the interaction at the town gate in chapter 4 between Boaz and "Mr. So-and-So," the nearer of kin. For example, Lau notes that the anonymity of the nearer kinsman is significant in a chapter concerned with establishing names, but from an honour and shame perspective, the anonymity may also serve an important purpose—to protect the man and his descendants from ongoing shame for his refusal to redeem the land and so acquire Ruth (p. 238).

This is a wonderful commentary on a very special book. It was a joy to read.

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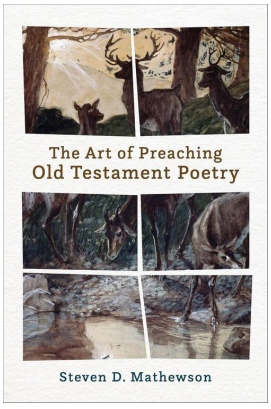
Steven D. Mathewson. *The Art of Preaching Old Testament Poetry*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2024. xiii + 242 pp. £23.99/$27.99.



This volume is the second installment in a series of books Mathewson has published to help readers learn how to preach Old Testament texts. His first book, *The Art of Preaching Old Testament Narrative* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2021) offers interpretive guidance and preaching strategies for dealing with narrative passages. This volume turns to poetic books in the Old Testament and consists of an introduction, seven main chapters, and seven appendices containing sample sermons on Old Testament poetic texts. Each of the main chapters dealing with a poetic book concludes with a list of essential resources for further study.

The introduction begins by acknowledging the difficulties with interpreting and preaching poetic texts due to their highly emotive nature. Mathewson provides help in two ways: first, by bringing together the best of the scholarly works to bear on the interpretation of the passages, and second, by offering preaching strategies that are "faithful to the text and to the listeners (who may or may not have a taste for the kind of literature found in these books)" (p. 4).

Chapter 1, "Preparing to Preach Old Testament Poetry," addresses the basics of preaching, on the one hand, and the basic elements of poetry, on the other. Mathewson identifies eight characteristics of effective expository sermons: accurate, clear, compelling, relevant, collaborative, spirit-empowered, revelatory, and redemptive. When working together, these elements convey the meaning of the text and relate it to the listeners. He proceeds to discuss the three main elements of Hebrew poetry: terseness, parallelism, and imagery. He offers examples of different types of parallelisms and figures of speech to help his readers appreciate the beauty and depth of Hebrew poetry.

Chapter 2, "Preaching Psalms," begins by describing various types of psalms and examining their emotional trajectories, as well as analyzing the structural unity of the Psalter across its five books. The author then presents two strategies for engaging listeners: 1) using poetic flair by painting word pictures or reading a psalm with feeling, and 2) guiding listeners through the flow of thought in a psalm, using Psalms 46 and 121 as examples. He offers ideas for preaching a sermon series on the book of Psalms, especially during Christmas and Lent/Easter as "opportune seasons" (p. 59). Mathewson suggests reading the Psalms "in anticipation of Christ" as a prayer to Jesus, a prayer of Jesus, or "how Jesus fulfills description of God in the psalms" (p. 60).

Chapter 3, "Preaching Proverbs," opens by examining the structure of the book of Proverbs. Mathewson outlines two major divisions: 1) Proverbs 1–9 articulate the superiority of wisdom over folly, and 2) Proverbs 10–31 provide examples of what it means to live guided by wisdom. He then addresses several interpretive concerns. He avers that proverbs do not offer promises but rather situational advice, as in the case of the seemingly contradictory advice in Proverbs 26:4–5. Any proverbial advice should be interpreted through the lens of God's love, as in the case of physical discipline. Furthermore, he argues that Proverbs 31 should be read as an example of wisdom for both men and women. Mathewson's preaching strategies include intentional, in-depth personal study of the book, supplemented by reading commentaries. He organizes sermon series topically and thematically and includes excerpts from his

own sermons. He believes that preaching Proverbs should point to Christ as the culmination of wisdom (p. 93).

Chapter 4, "Preaching Job," begins with a brief commentary on the structure and content of the book of Job, paying attention to the main characters, their dialogues with each other and God, the importance of wisdom, and the lessons that suffering and grief teach a believer. Mathewson argues that preaching Job should start with preaching Jesus in Job, as the answer to all suffering is found in Christ (p. 109). He then outlines his idea of "an ideal sermon series" on Job, a series he previously preached.

Chapter 5, "Preaching Ecclesiastes," opens with a concise overview of Ecclesiastes, discussing its structure and various perspectives to understand its message. It moves then to discuss key words and concepts in Ecclesiastes, e.g., "vapor," "gain," and "under the sun" (p. 131). Mathewson's preaching strategies include sermon series based on different ways of breaking the book into smaller portions and focusing on key texts. He also shares examples from his own outlines and sermon excerpts. When addressing the issue of preaching Christ in Ecclesiastes, Mathewson argues that true happiness is found in Jesus and serving him is "not an empty pursuit" (p. 140).

Chapter 6, "Preaching Song of Songs," begins with a brief commentary on the role of Solomon, the structure and literary strategy of the book, and its purpose. Mathewson cautions against oversexualizing the words of the love song when interpreting the metaphors. He locates the presence of God in "flashes of fire" (Song 8:6) as an expression of committed physical love between a husband and a wife. The author's preaching strategies include reading the entire text together with some critical resources, and he includes an outline of a single sermon along with several theological insights from its message. When addressing the issue of preaching Christ in the Song of Solomon, Mathewson argues that "we can utilize various lines from Song of Songs and either direct them to or refer them to Christ" (p. 166).

Chapter 7, "A Final Word," encourages readers to become familiar with the poetic books of the Old Testament and get comfortable with preaching them on a regular basis. The author believes that these books provide answers, offer guidance, and bring hope to faithful followers of God.

This volume provides a helpful introduction to the riches of the Old Testament poetic books by explaining the basics of the poetic genre and offering ways of reading each book as a cohesive whole rather than a collection of verses. The book also provides practical advice on the crafting and delivery of sermons based on these hard-to-preach books. However, one is left wondering why Mathewson finds it necessary to preach Christ in each of these books. While Jesus is clear about coming to fulfill the law (Matt 5:17), he is also clear that the Law and the Prophets are sufficient in presenting the complete message of God's love and truth (Luke 16:29–31). It would have greatly benefited this volume, and present-day Christians, if Mathewson had also offered interpretive strategies of reading and embodying the truths of Old Testament poetry on its own terms. Nevertheless, this book is a helpful addition to those striving to preach the entire counsel of Scripture.

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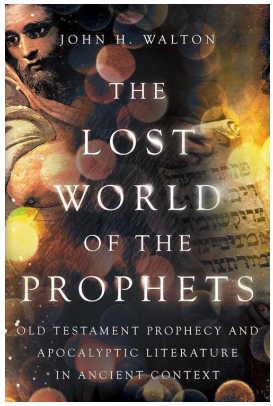
Walton, John H. *The Lost World of the Prophets: Old Testament Prophecy and Apocalyptic Literature in Ancient Context*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2024. 183 pp. £18.99/$22.00.



The prophetic and apocalyptic books of the Old Testament provoke both fascination and confusion for modern readers. Some see them as cryptic yet mesmerizing, roadmaps that reveal God's plans for the future. Others see them as hopelessly impenetrable and difficult to appropriate for a contemporary Christian context. As a result, prophecy is often misunderstood or avoided altogether. *The Lost World of the Prophets*, the latest installment in John Walton's Lost World Series, was written to help readers better understand prophecy as a phenomenon in ancient Israel and its literary expression in the prophetic and apocalyptic books of the Old Testament.

John Walton is Emeritus Professor of Old Testament at Wheaton College and Graduate School. As with many of his books, *The Lost World of the Prophets* seeks to bridge the gap between Old Testament scholarship and non-specialist readers who hold a high view of Scripture. A key concern is to help readers recognize the influence of their "cultural river" (i.e., values, beliefs, and worldviews that are shaped and influenced by their culture or subculture) on their reading of Scripture and the importance of reading the Old Testament in light of the "cultural river" of Israel and the ancient Near East (p. 6).

The Lost World of the Prophets is structured around sixteen propositions about prophecy, prophetic books, and the interpretation of prophetic books. These propositions are divided thematically into five sections. Section 1 deals with prophecy in the context of the ancient Near East. In the first proposition, Walton argues that prophecy is best understood as a form of divination, which he defines as any means by which human beings receive communication from the divine realm (pp. 13–14). When viewed as a subcategory of divination, information about prophets and other diviners in Mesopotamia can illuminate both the nature and function of prophecy in the Old Testament. Perhaps the most important insight to be gleaned is that prophets were not predicters of the future but individuals who announced the plans and thinking of God (p. 27). These messages, like weather reports, were meant to warn their recipients and call them to change their ways so they could avoid the projected plan for the future (pp. 16–17).

Section 2 deals with prophecy as a phenomenon. For the sake of brevity, we will limit ourselves to a discussion of the third proposition. In this proposition, Walton expands on the idea that prophets were not predictors of the future but functioned as spokespersons who announced the plans and thinking of God (pp. 35–36). According to Walton, *prediction* is an inappropriate category for prophecy since it assumes that God has no causal role in the predicted events (p. 36). God does not predict; he decrees (p. 36). Walton devotes a significant amount of space under this proposition to three prophecies that include specific information about the future: the prophecy about Josiah in 1 Kings 13:2, the prophecy about Bethlehem in Micah 5:2, and the prophecies about Cyrus in Isaiah 44 and 45. Some readers may find Walton's discussion of the first and third examples problematic. For the prediction about Josiah, Walton points out that Kings reached its final form after the time of Josiah (p. 39). This means that the name Josiah may have been added to this prophecy after the fact. While this is certainly possible on a historical-critical level, it seems to me that Walton's understanding of prophecy and his concern for divorcing it from prediction has forced him to exclude evidence that does not fit with his paradigm. In

this regard, it is important to remember that although the final form of Kings can be dated to the exilic period, its source material is much older.

Section 3 deals with the prophetic books of the Old Testament as literature. Walton includes several propositions that help readers become better interpreters of prophetic books. He includes a brief discussion of the main subgenres used in prophetic literature (proposition 7), a discussion of how prophetic books were formed (proposition 8), and a brief section about the implied audience of prophetic books (proposition 9). Although these propositions are quite useful as a whole, some readers may find his discussion of Isaiah under proposition 9 to be problematic. In this section, Walton describes the position that Isaiah's original prophecies were supplemented in later generations by inspired prophets who added relevant material for the exilic (Second Isaiah) and post-exilic (Third Isaiah) periods (pp. 81–83). Although Walton is non-committal about whether this position is correct, the weight he gives to this view—combined with his explanation of why the name Cyrus is included in Isaiah 40–55 (p. 43)—suggests to readers that this view is a legitimate option for people who hold a high view of Scripture. The sheer weight he gives to this issue may even suggest to readers that this is the preferable option.

Section 4 deals with prophetic fulfillment, while the final section deals with Apocalyptic literature. Both sections provide helpful and practical insights for the reader.

Overall, *The Lost World of the Prophets* provides an excellent introduction to both prophecy and the prophetic books of the Old Testament. It effectively bridges the gap between Old Testament scholarship and non-specialist readers and yields many fascinating insights along the way. However, some readers may find that Walton's views on prophecy may overwhelm his interpretation of some prophetic texts.

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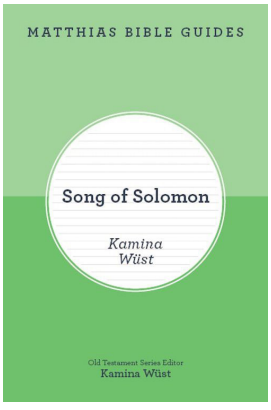
Kamina Wüst. *Song of Solomon*. Matthias Bible Guide. Sydney: Matthias Media, 2023. 147pp. £11.71/$16.99.



The Song of Solomon is a wily book, consistently evading any considerable agreement on its interpretation throughout church history. The purpose of the Song of Solomon volume in the Matthias Bible Guides series is not to bring the centuries of discussion to a conclusion. Rather, it, along with other Matthias Bible Guides, aims to be a high-level starting point "that's informed by serious scholarship yet accessible to all" (p. 3). To this end, Kamina Wüst has produced a guide that balances the many perspectives of the song's poetic style, undefined voices, and sudden movements. The hope is that the reader will be informed enough to begin a journey towards their own interpretation.

In chapters 1–4 Wüst lays a foundation for approaching the Song of Solomon. In chapter 1, she suggests the core of the song's message is best understood by following a trail of verses in which the protagonist, the woman, repeatedly warns the hearer to be careful in awakening love—a common interpretational approach. In chapter 2, she explores what is known and what is speculated in matters of provenance and covers a brief history of the song's genre classification over time, providing a helpful vantage point for interpretation.

In chapter 3, she explores the characters of the song, paying special attention to the (potential) character of Solomon and the Daughters of Jerusalem, both of whom are foundational to her understanding of the function of the song for contemporary readers. Wüst wrote her doctoral thesis on the function of Solomon and the Daughters of Jerusalem, and much of that work has made its way into this book in a very readable format. In chapter 4, she covers some key locations and settings in the song, both named places and place imagery. This group of chapters lays a necessary foundation for the theological interpretation that follows.

In chapters 5–8, Wüst explores various intra-biblical allusions. In chapter 5, she considers possible connections to other major biblical themes, such as the Garden of Eden and a potential reversal of the curse. The breadth of connections she draws are interesting for their variety as well as their obviousness—at least once the connection has been made. In chapter 6, she touches on the hot topics of our day: sex and the body, marriage, gender relations, and covenant fidelity. The length and aim of the book leave her little space to explore these topics in detail, but she provides fine starting points for anyone wanting to explore these topics through the lens of the Song of Solomon. In chapter 7, she explores a selection of words that are important for her interpretation of the song. Where helpful, she covers the Hebrew background of these words and draws fascinating and relevant connections to help enrich the reader's interpretation of the song. In chapter 8, a very short chapter, she stretches a few possible allusions to the song in the New Testament, acknowledging the consensus that there are no clear allusions in the New Testament. This group of chapters make it clear that the Song of Solomon is not a book isolated from the rest of the corpus of Scripture but is as deeply integrated as any other canonical book.

In chapters 9–13, Wüst takes the reader through a basic interpretation of the song. In chapter 9, she examines the major debates surrounding the Song of Solomon. There are so many key issues surrounding this book, and they so heavily influence its interpretation that, by necessity, this is the longest chapter in the book—even longer than her commentary notes on the text. She lays out her perspective on each issue but is fair in presenting opposing views. In chapter 10, Wüst argues that, while some books shout the name of Jesus, the Song of Solomon whispers it (p. 87). She encourages the reader to allow the song to draw connections to Jesus in its own unique way and to avoid conflation with themes in other biblical books. In chapter 11, she observes repeated structural elements across the song and uses them as signposts for what she sees as the five main sections of the song, laying the groundwork for the commentary. In chapter 12, she begins her commentary of the text. The commentary itself is quite light, as per the purpose of this book, but she provides helpful reflection questions at the end of each section to prompt the reader to develop their own understanding. If engaged with thoughtfully, this is perhaps the most valuable component of the whole book. In chapter 13, she closes off the book with three sets of suggested teaching outlines that can be used for talks or studies. This group of chapters provide an excellent high-level overview of the text itself and the interpretational complexities surrounding it.

Wüst has done an exceptional job presenting extensive research even-handedly within a concise format. Any lack of depth or coverage can reasonably be attributed to its goal of being a high-level starting point for further exploration. She also provides a rare contribution to the literature, especially at the popular level, in her exploration of Solomon as a negative character in the song. It is something which is often acknowledged but seldom given time.

If you are unfamiliar with the Song of Solomon and are wanting a definitive interpretation, this is not it. But if you are looking for a starting point to wade your way through the ambiguity intrinsic to the

Song of Solomon and eventually come to your own conclusion, then there is no reason to not start with this impressively compact guide.

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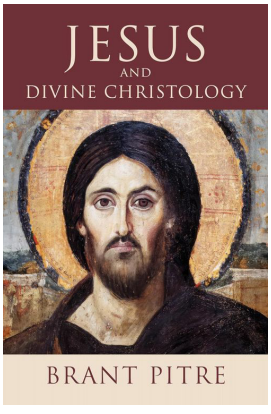
— NEW TESTAMENT —

Brant Pitre. *Jesus and Divine Christology*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2024. viii + 408 pp. £31.99/$39.99.



There are two different and disconnected streams in NT scholarship when it comes to matters of Christology. On the one hand, the quests for the historical Jesus have typically read the synoptic portrayals of Jesus as devoid of any indication that Jesus was self-conscious of his divinity. On the other hand, various scholars (Bauckham, Hengel) of the earliest Christian reception of Jesus have concluded that the early church held to a high and, even, divine Christology. Pitre, Distinguished Research Professor of Scripture at the Augustine Institute Graduate School of Theology and author of *Jesus the Bridegroom* (New York: Image, 2014), enters into these two discussions with this book.

His thesis is that "the best explanation for why the earliest Jewish followers of Jesus believed he was divine shortly after his death is because Jesus himself spoke and acted as if he were divine during his lifetime" (p. 12). In the first chapter, Pitre states that there are four "historical warrants" in support of this thesis emerging from scholarship on Second Temple Judaism, the historical Jesus, and earliest Christianity: (1) "early Jesus evidence for divine messiahs"; (2) the growing consensus among scholars that "Jesus spoke and acted as if he was the Jewish messiah" (p. 15); (3) an increased awareness that Jesus made divine claims not only in the gospel of John but in the synoptic gospels; and (4) claims of divine status made by others (e.g., Antiochus IV Epiphanes) in the Second Temple period.

Regarding methodology, Pitre draws from E. P. Sanders's elucidation of a "triple-context approach" (p. 27) in his *Jesus and Judaism* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985): first, "contextual plausibility within first-century Judaism"; second, "coherence with other evidence about Jesus"; and third, impact on and formation of the beliefs of the early church. While he recognizes that, at best, this methodology can establish claims at the level of plausibility, given the lack of certain or comprehensive knowledge attending these three areas, he argues that the strength of each is found in the fact that the reversal of the "triple-context approach" can be used to make the case "against the historicity of words and actions attributed to Jesus" (p. 33).

The body of the book (chs. 2–5) follows the same basic structure for each case: exposition, arguments against historical plausibility, application of the "triple-context approach," and a conclusion weighing the case for and against historical plausibility. Chapter 2 discusses the epiphany miracles of Jesus, i.e., those miracles whose "main function is to" display "the invisible mystery" of Jesus's divine identity (p. 44; e.g., Jesus stilling the storm in Mark 4:35–41). Chapter 3 explores Jesus's use of "riddle-like parables," which, Pitre argues, were employed "to reveal and conceal the mystery of his divinity"

(p. 112). Chapter 4 builds on the widespread recognition that Jesus's ministry is best understood in the "context of Jewish apocalypticism" (p. 172). Here, Pitre focuses on "the heavenly dimension of Jesus's apocalyptic worldview," with Jesus revealing that "he is both a human and heavenly figure" (p. 172). The fifth chapter analyzes Jesus's crucifixion for blasphemy, i.e., Jesus's claim to divinity. The final chapters discuss the implications of Pitre's findings.

Some sampling of Pitre's discussion is in order. First, regarding Jesus stilling the storm in Matthew 8:23–27 (and parallels), despite the fact that most scholarship sees this miracle as unhistorical and, at best, a literary fiction, Pitre argues that it is contextually plausible for "a sudden windstorm" (p. 59) to occur on the sea of Galilee and Jesus's rebuke of the storm would fit with Jewish belief that "invisible angelic powers" (p. 59) brought about such phenomena. In addition, this scene coheres with other evidence that Jesus rebuked his disciples for their lack of faith (cf. Mark 4:40; 6:30) and acted and spoke as if he had power over "invisible spiritual forces" (p. 62) and that Jesus and his disciples traveled by boat. Moreover, Jesus's power over forces of nature is reflected in such passages as Colossians 1:15–16 and Hebrews 1:2–3. Thus, the reason for scholarly rejection of this scene's historicity is a philosophical bias against such an occurrence happening.

Turning to the discussion of Matthew 19:16–22 (and parallels), specifically, "Why do you ask me what is good? There is only one who is good" (Matt 19:17a), Pitre argues that either Jesus is denying that he is God and therefore good or he is alluding to the Decalogue and the Shema to imply his equality with God. He marshals evidence for the second view. By adding to the Decalogue (Matt 19:21) and alluding to the Shema ("only one"; cf. Deut 6:4; 1 Cor 8:5–6), he is implicitly leading the rich man to "a realization of his divinity" (p. 140). Lastly, Pitre makes the compelling case that Jesus's allusion to his divinity—seen in such passages as Matthew 9:2–8, John 8:58–59, and Mark 14:61–64—is the dominant reason for his crucifixion rather than alternative proposals (e.g., "Anti-temple," "Anti-Torah," [p. 247]).

This is simply a stunning work, as Pitre, with thoroughness and rigor, argues for the historicity of each case and their bearing on Jesus's own claims of divine status. By employing his three criteria in trenchant conversation with secondary literature, he demonstrates that the historical Jesus is not removed from early Christology, the Gospel of John is not less historical than the synoptics, and that the four Gospels attest to Jesus's divinity in distinct yet complementary ways. This is required reading for those working in the fields of the historical Jesus and the early reception of the same.

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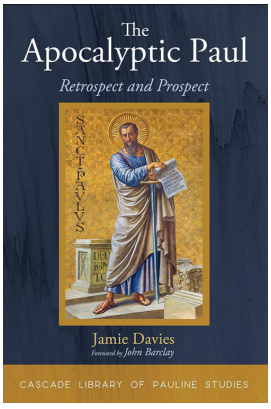
David Shaw. *The 'Apocalyptic' Paul: An Analysis and Critique with Reference to Romans 1–8.* Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament 2. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2024. xiii + 194 pp. £63.30/$87.00.



Those familiar with Pauline studies will know that the apocalyptic school of Pauline interpretation looms large. In this revised version of his Cambridge PhD thesis, Shaw, who serves as a pastor of Woodstock Road Baptist Church in Oxford, offers a helpful engagement with this prominent interpretive school.

Shaw argues that there is no study that has significantly evaluated the "exegetical foundations" of the "apocalyptic Paul" (p. 6) and numerous "conflicting accounts of Paul" (p. 6) have been put forward under the umbrella of "apocalyptic." With these differing approaches in mind, Shaw's purpose in this monograph is to analyze the different ways in which an apocalyptic approach has been executed and, in turn, to evaluate these distinct expressions of the apocalyptic Paul exegetically.

This book is divided into three parts. Part 1 surveys eight scholars commonly associated with an "apocalyptic" understanding of Paul's letters. Thus, eight chapters look at William Wrede, Albert Schweitzer, Ernst Käsemann, J. Christiaan Beker, Martinus de Boer, J. Louis Martyn, Beverly Roberts Gaventa, and Douglas A. Campbell, respectively. Here, the discussion of each scholar is framed by the concepts of plight and solution. Part 2 (chs. 9–10) provides a synthesis of the first part, framed, again, by plight and then solution. Part 3, consisting of three chapters (chs. 11–13), critically analyzes the exegetical strengths and weaknesses of the various approaches surveyed in Part 1.

Turning to part 1, though many see Käsemann as the forerunner of the apocalyptic Paul, Shaw argues that he is more of a popularizer and drew from the earlier work of Wrede and Schweitzer. By including Wrede in the list of scholars working in this vein, Shaw broadens the history of this interpretative school. Specifically, he argues that Wrede's emphasis on "powers and spiritual beings" and "participatory and universalistic soteriology" as well as his criticism of "Protestant individualism" (p. 17) influenced later interpreters. Shaw sees with Schweitzer an emphasis on mysticism, i.e., "mystical union with Christ" (p. 21), as the primary solution—over against the eschatological and juridical—to the plight of enslavement to demonic powers. Despite later reception of Käsemann by de Boer, among others, Shaw demonstrates that the former is not as far removed from Bultmann or, indeed, from Luther, as is often supposed with the central place he gives to justification.

Martyn, though drawing from de Boer's basic schema of Jewish apocalyptic—in short, two distinct tracks of cosmological and forensic apocalyptic, with the latter replacing the former—introduces a shift from the future to an "inaugurated eschatology" (p. 68). Gaventa, in turn, follows Martyn with a thoroughgoing apocalyptic reading of Paul, departing from Schweitzer and de Boer. Campbell, for Shaw, is a return to Schweitzer, as he departs from Gaventa's interaction with Martyn by seeing "the theological consistency of Paul and the integrity" of the letter to the Romans as in direct conflict. With the synthesis of his survey, Shaw discerns two basis components throughout the eight authors discussed: (1) salvation is largely "liberative" and decidedly "not forensic in character," and (2) it is "emphatically universalistic," i.e., "an objective and ontological transformation of the human situation has occurred" (p. 115).

Given that de Boer, Gaventa, and Campbell are the most recent representatives of the apocalyptic school, Shaw gives attention to their respective exegesis of Romans 1–8 in the third part. Regarding Romans 1–4, he argues against the attempt by de Boer and Campbell to sever these chapters from Romans 5–8. Shaw demonstrates—in light of "forensic terminology" in Romans 5:1–11, 12–21, and the return to such language in Romans 8—that Romans 5 does not signal a departure from Romans 1–4. Rather, Romans 6–8, with Romans 5 as the hinge, builds on the earlier argument established in Romans 1–4. Regarding the question of the nature of the plight in Romans 1–8, while apocalyptic interpreters are right to see "conflict between God and anti-God powers," the primary focus is on "the hostility between God and humanity" (p. 140). Finally, regarding the apocalyptic construal of sin, death, and the flesh in Romans 1–8, Shaw argues that while many of their insights hold, these interpreters oversimply the picture, effectively removing the need for human beings to receive divine forgiveness for sins.

In conclusion, Shaw has provided the scholarly community with a well-argued and long-needed exploration of apocalyptic approaches to Paul on exegetical grounds. By drawing the development of this school back to Wrede and including the most recent work (to the date of this monograph's publication) of Gaventa and Campbell, he shows both the divergencies and commonalities that exist between the various scholars. Moreover, by having a critical yet sympathetic eye toward the various treatments of Paul, Shaw's work is a model of brevity, clarity, and charity as he is able to tease out both their distinct strengths and weaknesses.

The only minor point of improvement that could be made, which the author himself recognizes, is that interactions with de Boer, Campbell, and Gaventa on Romans 1–8 required him to patch together their discussion of these chapters from various publications. If this monograph were to be revised in the future, or if another were to build on Shaw's work, interactions with the recent publication of Gaventa's full length commentary on Romans would be necessary. This monograph is essential reading for any serious student of Paul or scholar who is concerned with the interpretive approaches of the "apocalyptic Paul" school.

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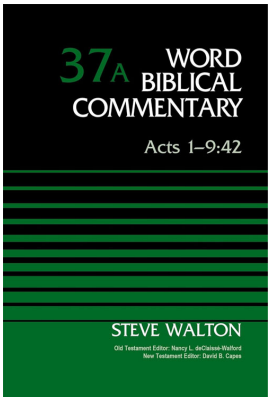
Steve Walton. *Acts 1–9:42*. Word Biblical Commentary 37a. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2024. 697 pp. £57.00/$72.99.



The first volume of Steve Walton's much anticipated WBC commentary on Acts 1–9:42 has now been released, with two more forthcoming. Walton serves as the senior research fellow in New Testament at Trinity College Bristol.

The WBC series, founded in 1977, represents a broadly evangelical series that offers a rich diversity of denominational allegiances and is meant to represent the best in biblical scholarship. WBC has several distinctive features, including: an extensive bibliography at the beginning of each section; the author's own translation with notes; an introductory section covering redaction, genre, sources, and tradition; and finally, the most common aspect of a commentary, verse-by-verse interpretation.

Walton acknowledges his indebtedness to other scholars and their work on Acts yet seeks to be intentionally textually focused. He says the picture he has in mind for this commentary is of himself and various other scholars engaging with the Greek texts of Acts, which sits in the middle of the table (p. 86). Walton affirms that his approach to Acts is the belief that the book is fundamentally about God, "for its author presents the key moments in the story first and foremost as God's actions" (p. 79). To understand God (or theology), however, he must engage in textual, syntactical, historical, literary, and social-scientific approaches. Unique to his approach is that he waits to discuss authorship, date, theology, and other items until the end of the third volume since he thinks it is best to discuss such things after reading through the book rather than in advance (p. 88).

Unlike Walton, I venture to give my general conclusion about his work at the beginning. I find Walton's commentary one of the best in the space, a commentary that contains detailed exegetical, syntactical, and historical analysis. The first volume exhibits numerous strengths that will serve pastors and scholars for years to come.

First, Walton offers nuanced and erudite explanations of the Greek text. While Keener might do more with background work in his four volumes, I think this will become the "go-to" commentary for detailed exegetical analysis. One endorsement noted that Walton is a "master of exegetical conversation," and many readers will likely agree. For example, on the Ethiopian eunuch he discusses why he takes a καί as continuative, a verb as passive rather than middle, a γάρ as coordinate rather than explanatory, and why he takes a genitive with ablative force. These comments are all found in the introductory notes, as he saves his main text for more general comments, but his general comments are still filled with meticulous analysis.

Second, Walton does not merely deal with grammar and syntax but integrates these realities into a larger knowledge of the book of Acts. For example, more recently there has been discussion of what ἤρξατο means when Luke says his first volume covered what Jesus "began to do and teach" (Acts 1:1). Walton notes it could be a Semitic redundancy, denote the beginning of Jesus's ministry, or imply that Luke's second volume contains what Jesus *continues* to do. Walton concludes that because Jesus continues to act within the ongoing story of Acts, it likely implies that Acts is about the continued work of Jesus both in person and through his agents (pp. 108–9). Walton therefore does not merely base his comments on the nuances of grammar but a larger reading and knowledge of Acts.

Third, though the commentary is detail-oriented, Walton still integrates theological and structural comments that contribute to his reading. Though some might critique the work for focusing too much on the minutiae, Walton allows the minutiae to lead to larger conclusions about the text. He works from the conviction that one can only understand the big picture if one first patiently works through the details. Too often we begin with the big picture and neglect the hard work of detailed linguistic and historical analysis. Walton's commentary is a welcome exegetical treasure trove.

Though Walton's commentary will likely become a favorite for those who study Acts, I will note a few limitations. Some of these pertain to the WBC series, while others relate to Walton's own work. First, though Walton promises to do theology and certainly theologizes more than many might expect for a commentary of this stripe, it still lacks the robust theological reflection that I believe commentaries deserve. To simply state that God is the main subject and not engage with systematic loci at key points seems to overpromise but underdeliver. For example, there is little discussion of what it means for Jesus to say that the Father has set the time of Israel's restoration by his own authority in 1:7 (p. 124). What are the implications for Jesus's authority in this statement? Is the will of the Father different than

Jesus's? Does Jesus know the hour of restoration? There are significant theological issues raised by this statement that are bypassed without comment.

Second, though each pericope ends with an "explanation" that concentrates on the big picture of each section, the detailed nature of this commentary left something to be desired in fronting the major points and literary flow of each section. This could have been because the "explanation" came at the end rather than the beginning of the section and thus did not allow readers to ascertain principles that would guide them through the details. Some might be frustrated with the attention to details and get lost in the weeds before they see the big picture.

Third, some pastors and scholars will find aspects of this commentary unnecessary. This speaks more to the nature of a commentary series developed in 1977 and the changing tides of scholarship than to Walton's ability. For example, though Walton is brief and judicious with his comments on "sources" behind texts, the reality is that scholars have slowly lost confidence that we can accurately identify the sources behind a text and have become less convinced that the quest for sources should play a key role in interpretation. Additionally, the "delimitation of the pericope" or the "structure" can be at times helpful, but other times it was somewhat obvious. My deduction is that many will skip certain sections of this commentary and benefit from others. In short, the WBC has a structure, elements, and even an aesthetic that unfortunately dates it.

Overall, Walton's first volume has met the high expectations. Though some will want to turn to shorter and more narratival/theological commentaries to supplement Walton, if they get stuck on a thorny exegetical issue Walton will be one of the first commentaries to turn to. In fact, in a time where people are looking for big picture comments, Walton reminds us to first look closely at the details before we build a framework that might distort the text rather than illumine it.

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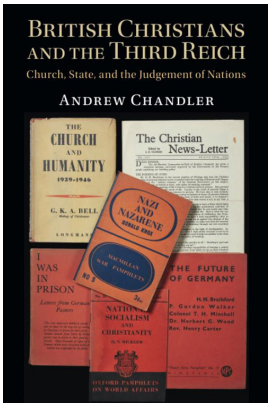
— HISTORY AND HISTORICAL THEOLOGY —

Andrew Chandler. *British Christians and the Third Reich: Church, State, and the Judgement of Nations*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022. x + 422 pp. £24.99/$34.00.



How might today's church leaders engage with the heightening international tensions and outbreaks of armed conflict precipitated by competing ideological systems? Those who wish to think well about such challenges might consider how their ancestors in the faith responded to clashes between nations under conflicting ideological regimes.

In *British Christians and the Third Reich*, Andrew Chandler argues that historians should study British Christian thinking about the Third Reich because, by having been subject to a wealth of scholarly endeavour, it allows us to evaluate trends in the practice of historiography, building upon them to reach clearer, more precise, and more complex interpretations of the past

(p. 2). It therefore forces us to reconsider earlier understandings of twentieth-century Britain as a secularising state where religious belief and practice were increasingly relegated to the margins (p. 6). It also challenges previous assumptions that twentieth-century Britain was largely detached from Europe, showing how British churches pursued international ecumenical ties and advocated internationalism as a means of peacekeeping (pp. 6–7).

Chandler develops the argument chronologically, dividing the years between 1933 and 1945 into five periods to chart how British Christian attitudes toward the Third Reich changed and intersected (pp. 8–9). The opening two chapters lay the groundwork for this approach, outlining the religious cultures from which British Christians engaged with the rise of the Third Reich. By evaluating a 1922 reflection on British Christianity by German professor Wilhelm Dibelius, Chandler establishes 'the reality of religious pluralism' throughout British society (p. 19) before showing that ecumenism and internationalism were interlinked in British public life with religious values at its centre (pp. 22–23).

Chapters 3–5 cover 1933–1934, demonstrating that, following the rise of Nazism, British church leaders developed definitive opinions on the regime and its ideology before considering how to respond. Informed of Nazi ideologies and practices through ecumenical networks, British Christians saw Nazism as evidence of a global crisis. They therefore started to protest the early displays of Nazi antisemitism (pp. 53–57). Chapter 4 shows that British Christians saw the tightening bonds between German churches and the Nazi state as an international problem requiring an international solution (p. 104). Becoming aware of concentration camps and secret police in Germany, British Christians engaged in international ecumenical dialogue to explore ecclesiastical responses (pp. 130–31).

Chandler then argues that, between 1935 and 1937, British Christians who opposed Nazism had to contend with those who, assuming the new regime would endure, increasingly sympathised with it. As chapters 6–8 indicate, many British Christians continued to protest the dangers of totalitarianism, particularly in light of Nazi antisemitism. They deemed Christianity and totalitarianism entirely incompatible (pp. 154–55). By 1936, 'there were many voices expressing a view on Hitler's Germany' (p. 169). Evidence of Nazi crackdowns on German Christians, epitomised in the arrest of Martin Niemöller in July 1937, provoked further ecumenical dialogue on the nature of totalitarianism in Nazi Germany (pp. 195–96).

Such dialogue gained urgency from 1938 to 1939 when successive instances of Nazi expansionism raised the spectre of war. British Christians, although critical of Nazism, supported Appeasement and encouraged prayers for its success (p. 233). Despite jubilantly interpreting the Munich Agreement as an answer to those prayers, the Kristallnacht attacks on Jews in November 1938 crystallised clerical fears that war was inevitable (pp. 246–48). This set the tone for a 'bleak fatalism which overtook the last days of peace' (p. 269).

In chapters 11–12, Chandler charts the changing attitudes of British Christians toward Nazi Germany during the first three years of the war. Whereas at the outbreak of war most Christians criticised the Nazi regime, not the German people, with the fall of France in mid-1940, they employed more stringent anti-German rhetoric (pp. 277–88). By late 1942, thanks to military victories and the potentially problematic alliance with the Soviet Union, British Christians adopted a cautious optimism about the prospects of victory (p. 325). Chandler also outlines how British Christians engaged more intensely in ecumenical work, including with Catholics, to protest Nazi persecution of Jews (p. 300).

The final section, comprising chapters 13–15, highlights that Christian leaders, often in ecumenical dialogue, debated possible responses to challenges likely to be presented after the increasingly probable

Allied victory. Christians, still committed to ecumenism, mirrored political leaders in developing the basis of any future peace and international order (pp. 349–50). Victory in 1945 vindicated Christian interpretations of the Third Reich, but for churchmen aware of events in Europe, it marked the next stage of an ongoing 'humanitarian crisis' necessitating European reconstruction and care for refugees (p. 371). Wartime Christian dialogue about the treatment of those deemed guilty of war crimes emphasised the need for a fair process and warned against vengefulness (p. 379).

Although purporting to encompass British Christian responses to the Third Reich, Chandler self-consciously focuses on the private and public records of significant figures within the Church of England since such clerics exerted significant influence on the leaders of other, smaller denominations in Britain (p. 5). This Anglo-centric approach, while justifiable, can be problematic insofar as it downplays regional distinctives, especially those of Scotland and Northern Ireland, where church leaders at a distance from the Church of England went to great lengths to formulate their own denominational attitudes towards the Third Reich.

Though this study focuses on British Christian responses to Nazi Germany, it could also inform how contemporary church leaders might engage with ostensible competitor states and ideologies. The efforts of such Christians to respond wisely to totalitarianism through public protest, ecumenical engagement, and commitment to internationalism are instructive for us today. However, if the church is to continue to be the church amid international tensions, the appropriation of such measures must not transcend or compromise the witness to the gospel.

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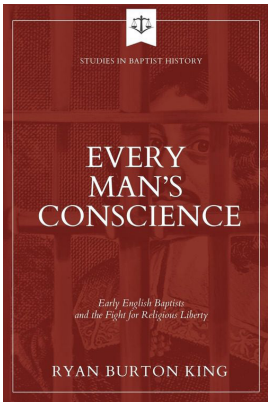
Ryan Burton King. *Every Man's Conscience: Early English Baptists and the Fight for Religious Liberty*. Studies in Baptist History 4. West Lorne, ON: H&E Academic, 2024. 101 pp. £12.99/$21.99.



Ryan Burton King is the pastor of Grace Baptist Church Wood Green in London, England. The church meets in a picturesque, early twentieth-century, red brick building in a residential area north of the old city, acquired in a church merger after Grace Baptist first covenanted together (under a different name) in 2004. This places Ryan King at the geographical heart of the subject he is addressing in his first book publication—Every Man's Conscience.

Malcolm Yarnell began his foreword by saying, "Every Man's Conscience will be one of the most valuable texts you ever read." (p. iii) This is quite a statement—I think an overstatement—but the book is certainly valuable. King provides the reader with a broad and concise summary of English Baptist history, especially focused on the Baptist fight for religious toleration. He marks out a fast-paced chronological history, highlighting major Baptist figures among the English Baptists. Students of Baptist history will easily recognize the big names (e.g., John Smyth, Thomas Helwys, and Roger Williams), and King also notes the progression of important confessions of faith produced by English Baptists during the seventeenth century.

In sum, King argues that "freedom of conscience" and "religious liberty" are "intrinsically linked to the Baptist 'free church' ecclesiology," and this "fuelled Baptists' intentional evangelistic methodology." (p. 2) Perceiving that many today (including some Baptists) are departing from this historic conviction, King wants people to "know and learn from Baptist history" so that they might trust "in the word of God, not a weaponised government, to do the work of gospel advance and to shape the conscience of the nation" (p. 2 n. 100). King's aim is to "provide an accessible framework for appropriate Christian engagement in response to apparent and emerging threats to religious liberty today" (p. 5).

After describing the hostile conditions into which Baptists sprouted at the beginning of the seventeenth century (in part 1), King weighed in on a hot historical debate (in part 2). Baptist historians are not at all agreed upon the relationship of early English Baptists and the radical reformers called Anabaptists. Some see considerable influence from the latter upon the former, and others see no positive influence at all. Defining Anabaptist doctrine and practice is yet another major difficulty because of the historical reality that they were a scattered and unorganized group. Nevertheless, King puts his cards on the table by saying, "It might be better to say that the Baptists came from English Separatism through the influence of what was called Anabaptism" (p. 25).

It would be impossible to adequately address the complicated historic relationship between Anabaptists and early English Baptists in a book this size, but it is important to note King's perspective because it flavors his narrative. He does not describe exactly what he means by religious liberty, except to say that Baptists believed all (even "heretics, Turks, Jews, or whatever") should have it (p. 32). King gives the impression that early English Baptists argued that civil government should have no interest at all in the religious affinities of its populace (i.e., the typical view of sixteenth-century Anabaptists). Liberation from persecution, coercion, and a state church was certainly the Baptist plea, but it is a historical fact that most early English Baptists advocated for a kind of religious freedom that included the civil enforcement of Christian ethics and societal norms. For example, the Second London Baptist Confession includes the affirmation that the Sabbath is a "positive, moral, and perpetual commandment, binding on all men in all ages" (2LBC 22.7).

And yet, the main point of King's thesis stands. Early English Baptists were indeed vigorous advocates of voluntary religion, and this set them at odds with other Protestants in England, who promoted and worked within a state-church polity. Furthermore, English Baptists were adamant in their arguments for the universal freedom of conscience, such that sinners would be persuaded by the gospel, not compelled by civil legislation and force. Therefore, King has made his case, but he has also failed to address the heart of the debate among Evangelical Christians today (in both the old world and the new). Many apparently agree with King (and historic figures like Roger Williams) that the invitation to repent and believe is a matter of every man's conscience. There is widespread disagreement, however, about the degree to which civil government should bind citizens' consciences and actions according to biblical commands and ethics.

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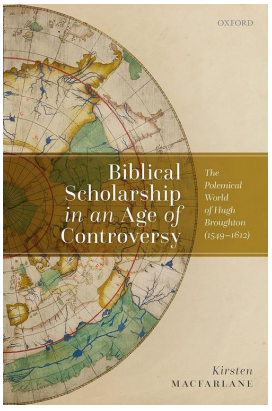
Macfarlane, Kristen. *Biblical Scholarship in an Age of Controversy: The Polemical World of Hugh Broughton (1549–1612)*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021. 288 pp. £87.00/$100.00.



Kristen Macfarlane recasts the historiography of the controversial Reformed figure Hugh Broughton (1549–1612) in *Biblical Scholarship in an Age of Controversy*. Macfarlane leverages Broughton to argue for a complex relationship between faith and scholarship in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and her foil is those recent historians who, she argues, have used Broughton to advance faulty conclusions. For those scholars, Broughton was merely an angry Puritan. While he attempted to engage in philological scholarship pertaining to the Bible, he did not realize that this foray would erode Christian belief in a divine, authoritative Bible. This "unintended consequence" (p. 15) resulted in skepticism for individuals and, later, the entire Western world. Macfarlane challenges this notion that Broughton was cluelessly undermining the Bible by exploring his conflicts, his work in Hebrew and Greek philology, and his pedagogy. Macfarlane's Broughton is a compelling example of how early modern biblical scholarship and strict belief in the divinity of the Bible were mutually edifying.

Macfarlane argues that time after time Broughton thought difficult biblical passages were solved best by rigorous engagement with the original languages, as well as reference to ancient, non-biblical literature. For example, a significant early modern debate in England concerned Jesus's descent into hell. First Peter 3:18 seems to speak of Christ preaching to people who have died, and the Apostle's Creed confessed Jesus's descent into Hades. Christian history had located this event between Christ's death and resurrection. What could that mean? In Broughton's day, Christians interpreted these texts primarily through the lens of their Christology. For those influenced by Luther's understanding of the *communicatio idiomatum* between Christ's human and divine natures, Jesus's physical body could be in the grave, descending into hell, and in heaven all at the same time. Thus, Christ's descent was a bodily descent. For those more aligned with Swiss-reformed Christology, Christ's body could only be in one location. Therefore, the "descent" could not be physical since his body was either on the cross or in the grave. Further, for Christ to take humanity's sin on himself, he had to suffer, not merely physically, but even the internal "pains of hell" on the cross. Anything less would not satisfy the punishment for sins (p. 153). These hell-pains were what the Creed and 1 Peter meant for the Reformed. Whether Lutheran or Reformed, such theological presuppositions about Christ drove interpretations of his descent.

In Broughton's case for Christ's descent, however, he made no attempt to address that Christology. Wielding philology, ancient pagan sources, and Jewish literature, his argument focused on what the word Hades meant, tracing it through 1 Peter's usage, the Septuagint, and the underlying Hebrew. Broughton considered Hebrew and Greek semantics as more decisive for the meaning of the text than Christology. Further, Macfarlane maintains that, though Broughton avoided theological argumentation, his argument supported the Swiss-reformed view of Christ. His philological method, therefore, did not result (as an "unintended consequence") in dismissal of the Bible's trustworthiness and authority but upheld a theological position convinced of a divine Bible.

Macfarlane also leverages Broughton's advances in textual criticism, such as his endeavor to produce a Hebrew-Greek concordance or his development of the influential theory of four dialects behind New Testament Greek—both indispensable tools for textual criticism and biblical exegesis. Macfarlane offers

another striking example. Broughton supported the Bible's authority in his solution to the apparent discrepancy between 2 Peter 2:15's assertion of "Bosor" as the father of Balaam and the various Old Testament passages that call Balaam's father "Beor" (e.g., Num 22:5). Broughton argued compellingly, with recourse to the Apostle Peter's location when he wrote the letter and quite technical semantic discussion of how names changed between languages. Clearly, Broughton's beliefs about the Bible often "lead him to produce useful scholarly tools" (p. 202). Such philological tools did not result in disbelief. In Broughton's case, the most sophisticated philology defended a higher view of Scripture.

Macfarlane recognizes that the theory of unintended consequences not only reads early modern history incorrectly but even mistakenly assumes that philological study and a divine view of the Bible cannot coexist. While Macfarlane appears convinced that even in Broughton's time, the Bible could easily be undermined, she clearly states that the answer to the question depends more on who is asking (p. 18). Contemporary activity in academic philology and textual criticism by Evangelicals who affirm the Bible's divinity proves the same point today that Broughton does for the past. Conclusive answers to the Bible's divine status via philological study are elusive, and the proposed answer often depends on who one is asking.

Overall, the book is convincing. Broughton's beliefs about the Bible motivated him toward unique, creative, and cutting-edge learning, and he often worked to present the fruit of that scholarship to lay readers. He could do this because his work supported the Bible's trustworthiness rather than undermined it. Those interested in the history of exegesis or the post-Reformation will find this work valuable. It is an academic work that will profit scholars of the English Reformation and of the Reformed tradition. Through extensive archival research and meticulous examination of even minute details, Macfarlane turns the historiography on its head to show that Broughton's belief in a divine Bible did not result in rejecting the Bible's authority but was rather a tool to uphold and support it.

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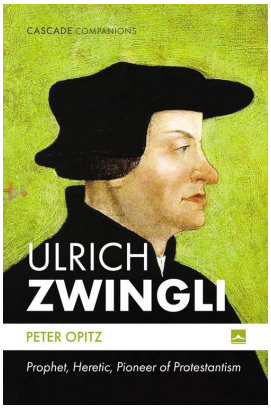
Peter Opitz. *Ulrich Zwingli: Prophet, Heretic, Pioneer of Protestantism*. Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2024. £14.00/$17.00.



In 1964, the Swiss theologian, Jean Rilliet, released a biography, *Zwingli: Third Man of the Reformation* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1964). The volume was an attempt to reinstate the Reformer of Zurich among the leaders of the Continental Reformation after centuries in which he had been left standing in the shade. Zwingli's premature death on the battlefield in 1531 (and rapid installation of the long-lived Heinrich Bullinger to be his successor) is but one of a range of factors that contributed to this neglect.

Happily, subsequent decades have seen modern biographies composed by G. R. Potter (*Zwingli* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984]), Ulrich Gäbler (*Huldrych Zwingli: Eine Einführung in sein Leben und sein Werk* [Munich: Beck, 1983), and more recently, Bruce Gordon (*Zwingli: God's Armed Prophet* [New Haven: Yale University Press, 2021], reviewed in *Themelios* 47.2). With these authors, Opitz means

to call into question the adequacy of any designation such as "third man" for the Reformer of Zurich. In a short space, he depicts a Zwingli who was a contemporary of Luther, for a time a member of a circle of admirers of Erasmus and, while he lived, the preeminent non-Lutheran Continental Protestant leader.

Sadly, the complex reasons for the relative neglect of Zwingli are not explored in Opitz's compact volume of 92 pages. As far as the English-speaking world goes, the neglect is rooted in choices made in early Victorian Britain. Calvin's theological and biblical writings were taken up and reprinted in translation as ready tools in combatting the rise of a Rome-ward ritualism in the national churches of England and (later) Scotland. While an English translation of the German biography of Calvin was in circulation by 1849, no comparable English-language biography of Zwingli was available before 1900. That the better-known Calvin was known to dislike certain opinions of Zwingli compounded the question of his relative influence.

What Opitz does provide is a series of striking assertions about Zwingli's unique role. The Reformation at Zurich was the first expression of what we call a "Magisterial" Reformation conducted under the authorization of an elected civic council rather than a solitary noble (pp. 42–43). The Zurich Reformation was the first in Europe to render the whole of the Scriptures into the vernacular language of the population (p. 51). This landmark was achieved by 1531, anticipating the completion of the entire Luther Bible by three years. Zurich, in Zwingli's time, had in its "Hohe Schule" (founded after 1525) the first Reformed theological academy in Europe (p. 53). Zwingli was the first Continental Reformer to appeal to the King of France for toleration for that country's persecuted Protestant minority. In this, he anticipated the effort of Calvin a full decade later (p. 66). Zwingli, in a career cut short in 1531, had still been the influencer (p. 86) of a whole range of younger Reformers (Bucer, Bullinger, Capito, Farel, Oecolampadius).

Opitz's verdict, as one might expect after the narration of such "firsts," is: "No theological idea voiced by Calvin had not already been discussed in the course of the Zwinglian Reformation. Both historically and theologically, Zwingli and not Calvin is the founding father of Reformed Protestantism" (p. 86). Opitz has not written a polemic as though to trample down an error, but he has, in brief compass, provided us with a revisionist portrait of a Protestant Reformer who has suffered undeserved neglect.

It can fairly be said that in doing so, Opitz has not sidestepped aspects of Zwingli's career that are unflattering. We read that while a young priest, he was numbered with the many Catholic clergy who were promiscuous. We find that he was secretly married to a widow for an extended period in advance of the Zurich council's approval of clerical marriage (p. 22). We read also of his familiarity with a Christian humanist circle at Zurich, some members of which opted for the radical path of Anabaptism; by doing so, they invited the prosecution and death which followed (pp. 27–34). The 1529 collision with Luther at Marburg is succinctly set out (pp. 68–72). The one aspect of Zwingli's career that the reviewer expected to see addressed—and did not—was the Reformer's aversion to the use of the arts—whether painting, metalworking, or music—in places devoted to the worship of God. Such excesses were only reconsidered in the time of his successor, Bullinger.

In 92 pages, the author has provided readers with an ideal introduction to this highly important first-generation Reformer of German Switzerland. We should put away the half-century-old designation, "third man." He was, at the very least, of the first rank—with Luther.

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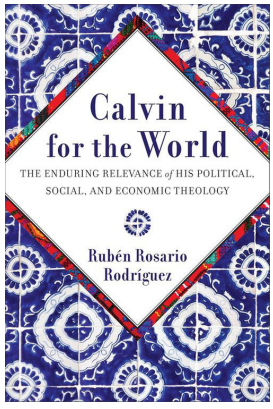
Rubén Rosario Rodríguez. *Calvin for the World: The Enduring Relevance of His Political, Social, and Economic Theology*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2024. £22.99/$27.99.



Rubén Rosario Rodríguez is the Clarence Louis and Helen Steber Professor of Theological Studies in Missouri's Jesuit-founded St. Louis University. He is concerned with showing that the social teaching of John Calvin, embedded in his theological writings, remains an important resource for Christians wrestling with societal questions of wealth and poverty, racial justice, toleration, and the right use of political authority. He is not the first writer to take up such questions; one thinks, for instance, of historian Fred Graham's *The Constructive Revolutionary: John Calvin and His Socio-Economic Impact* (Richmond, VA: John Knox, 1979). But Rosario Rodríguez is the first writer known to this reviewer to take up such questions as a Latin American, now a naturalized American citizen, openly identifying with both the Reformed theological tradition and Liberation Theology (p. 114).

The author's stance is that of a mainline Protestant and an admirer of the Barthian theological tradition. He is a theologian who, while affirming that God has revealed himself in history and left us a written "Word of God," at the same time concludes that this record of revelation in writing has been subject to distortion because it has been mediated by human means (p. 110). This somewhat equivocal stance means that Rosario Rodríguez will concern himself with the dissemination of ideas passed down to us from the era of Reformation rather than the judging of whether such views are faithful to the scriptural revelation. His position may be described as that of general loyalty to the Reformed tradition, broadly conceived, yet his position is averse to confessionalism.

In prefacing the book, Rosario Rodríguez acknowledges (pp. xi, xii) that a fair share of its contents has appeared in other formats extending as far back as the year 2001. As one would expect, he has made attempts to revise and update where possible. But the reader needs to note that the chapters which bring John Calvin into dialogue with such questions as the role of civil government (ch. 1), of Latin American Liberation Theology (ch. 2), the modern Refugee Crisis (ch. 3), Post-Vatican II Roman Catholicism (ch. 4), Religious Toleration (ch. 5) and the slow painful overthrow of South African Apartheid (ch. 7) do not necessarily represent fresh scholarship. In at least one case (a description of the failed Genevan mission to Brazil, part of the wider discussion of refugees [ch. 3]), his account is based on outdated research. Superior accounts of this important missionary effort are available. Still, overall, these chapters represent competent and stimulating introductions to their subject fields.

Scattered across these chapters are fascinating tidbits that will take the reader off-guard. Who was aware that Massachusetts Puritan Cotton Mather had a missionary concern for then-Spanish America? Mather taught himself Spanish and penned a catechism for illicit distribution in 1699 (p. 134). One of the earliest advocates of the theology of Karl Barth in Latin America was the president of Princeton Seminary, John A. Mackay, in lectures given in 1953 (p. 129). Mackay, fluent in Spanish, had earlier been a missionary to Peru. Calvin's Institutes were a primary resource in the campaign to overthrow apartheid in late twentieth-century South Africa (ch. 7).

The chapters also contain some interpretations that are questionable. In discussing Calvin's conception of the church of the Reformation era as transnational (transcending the efforts of any local or regional government to control it), Rosario Rodríguez describes Calvin's debt to Martin Bucer, the

Reformer of Strasburg. Bucer's important description of a Christian society, *De Regno Christi*, is dated to 1533 (p. 83). This treatise was presented by Bucer to England's King Edward VI in 1550. American missionary effort towards Latin America (which he portrays as broadly Calvinist) is portrayed as driven largely by commercial expansionist tendencies most recognizable in the late nineteenth century (p. 126). Under-recognized is the role played earlier by European Protestant immigrants to the newly-independent Latin American republics; the religious liberty granted as an enticement for them to immigrate also permitted the Bible Societies of London and New York to freely disseminate the Scriptures from the 1820s onwards. He seems largely unaware that Protestants generally focused greater missionary efforts in the late nineteenth century on India and China than on Latin America, which was at least under the influence of Roman Christianity.

For all that, this reviewer considers that *Calvin for the World* serves as a necessary reminder that the fresh appropriation of Calvin in the modern world is by no means the exclusive preoccupation of conservative evangelical Calvinists; it is also far from being the exclusive domain of those who live in Europe-derived societies. Why do conservative evangelicals persist in erroneously thinking that they hold something like proprietary rights to Calvin? And why does this same constituency primarily turn to Calvin on questions of soteriology and ecclesiology but not on matters such as the power of the state or human rights?

Calvin for the World invites comparison with segments of the recent *Oxford Handbook to Calvin and Calvinism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021). The latter volume, in addition to highlighting the modern reach of Calvin's teaching into Latin America and South Africa (regions explored by Rosario Rodríguez), probes Calvin's influence in modern China, West Africa, and Korea. Thus, it is fair to say that *Calvin for the World*, rather than being a trailblazing volume, is part of a much larger recent effort to explore the global dissemination of Calvin's influence across more than four centuries.

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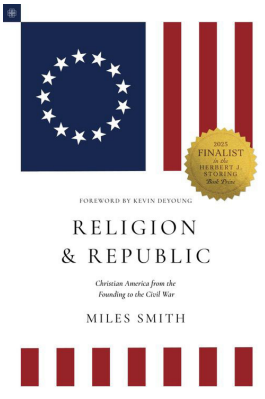
Miles Smith. *Religion and Republic: Christian America from the Founding to the Civil War.* The American Theology Series. Landrum, SC: Davenant, 2024. xxix + 306 pp. £23.72/$42.95.



Is America a Christian nation? This question has evoked countless books and even more debate. On one side of the argument, people point to the establishment clause of the First Amendment and the Jeffersonian "wall of separation" to prove that America was founded as a fundamentally secular nation, free from governmental religious influence. Opponents of this secular perspective point to the Christian convictions of many of the founders, to the Christianity of the broader colonial culture at the time of the American Founding, and to the establishment of state churches. The question of the Christian nature of the American Founding and the early republic has been taken up by scholars, Christian leaders, and laity alike.

This is the question that guides Miles Smith in *Religion and Republic: Christian America from the Founding to the Civil War.* In his book, Smith seeks

to give a comprehensive and historically rooted answer to the question of the Christian character of the early American republic. In seeking to answer the question, Smith argues that America, while officially areligious by virtue of federal disestablishment, was functionally Protestant due to the pervasiveness of what Smith calls "Christian institutionalism" (p. xxv), which he defines as the proliferation of Protestants and Protestant ideals in traditionally "nonreligious" American institutions. Protestant Christianity, according to Smith, was a foundational identity of the American people for the first century of the nation's existence.

Smith, a professor of history at Hillsdale College, posits that rather than a secularizing force, federal disestablishment was a tool used to uphold the English Whig tradition and perpetuate Christian—specifically Protestant—civilization through non-church institutions. These institutions—public schools, legislative bodies, courts, and private businesses—upheld the Protestant character of the early republic by their incorporating Protestant Christianity into the fabric of the American lived experience. Smith points to seven examples to support his argument: The unsuccessful secular vision of Thomas Jefferson, governmental legislation, courts and judicial decisions, private and public debates over sabbath laws, American international diplomacy, the American Indian policy, and public education. In each of these examples, Smith seeks to demonstrate that "while church and state might be separable, religion and politics were not" (p. 64). This Christian worldview and broad Christian institutionalism, according to Smith, was so deeply ingrained in the American psyche that it allowed for disestablishment in the first place (p. 3).

This *de facto* Christian America was maintained until the Civil War. Smith writes that in the postbellum period, Darwinism and secularism removed the broad cultural preference for Christianity. This was especially true in public education and in the judiciary. This trend, according to Smith, culminated in the 1960s' full-scale rejection of Christian institutions, leading to a broad rejection of traditional American Protestant dominance.

Religion and Republic is a well-sourced argument in favor of viewing the early American republic as a fundamentally Protestant nation. Smith wisely avoids framing his argument in terms of Christian morality. Rather, he maintains that it was primarily "nonreligious" institutions that created and maintained the Protestant Christian character of the early American republic. The book finds itself in a long and contentious stream of historiography regarding the religious temperament of the American founding. The twentieth century saw an extended academic discourse around how much influence Christianity—particularly the Great Awakening—had upon the founding. Smith has produced a welcome and fresh addition to this conversation, arguing not that the framers explicitly wrote their beliefs into the constitution but rather that the American ethos was so deeply Protestant that the framers included disestablishment to allow Christian institutionalism to flourish. The book's chapters are wide-ranging and helpful vignettes that show various aspects of the Christian nature of the early republic. Whether it be Thomas Jefferson's virulent secularization hopes or the aim of early public education to be the "chief vehicle for the implantation of Christian theology and Christian practice" (p. 239), Smith ably demonstrates the Protestant influence in nearly every corner of American culture.

This is not to say that the book is without flaws, the most glaring of which is the abundance of typographical/grammatical errors. The book is badly in need of an editor, and the errors are frequent enough to distract from the subject material. Additionally, in the preface, Smith comes out in strong opposition to Evangelicalism. This does not appear in the rest of the book, so the vigor with which he opposes Evangelicalism in the preface is inexplicable. He makes a stark distinction between Protestant

tradition and Evangelical tradition (p. xix), claims that Evangelicals view religious history in America as "socio-moral transformation typically centering around the Great Awakening" (p. xx), and states, bafflingly and without substantiation, that "'evangelicalism' doesn't have much of a history" (p. xxiv). Works on Evangelicalism such as Doug Sweeney's *The American Evangelical Story* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005) and Thomas Kidd's *Who is an Evangelical?* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2019) would strongly beg to differ. The preface seems to serve as Smith's personal soapbox against Evangelicalism, a position which he does not extrapolate through the rest of the book.

These issues notwithstanding, *Religion and Republic* presents a compelling and well-structured argument for the view of America as an unofficial-but-inarguably-Protestant nation. Through his examination of non-church American institutions, Smith cogently demonstrates that, despite official disestablishment, the early American republic was fundamentally defined by Protestant involvement in all aspects of culture. Thus, Smith answers the question, "was early America a Christian nation?" with a resounding and unequivocal "yes."

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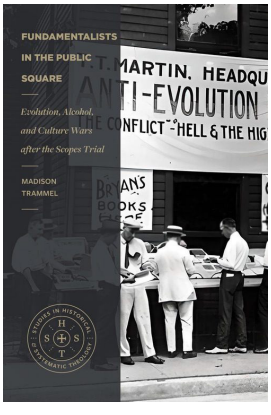
Madison Trammel. *Fundamentalists in the Public Square: Evolution, Alcohol, and Culture Wars after the Scopes Trial*. Studies in Historical and Systematic Theology. Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2023. xxx + 169 pp. £24.99/$29.99.



There is a common narrative among evangelicals that goes like this: fundamentalists withdrew from culture following the Scopes Trial in 1925 so they could lick their wounds and focus on investing in their churches and institutions. It was not until the postwar era, when Carl F. H. Henry published *The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism* (1947; reprint ed., Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2022), that born-again Protestants rediscovered cultural engagement. Henry and his colleagues were "neo-evangelicals" who were distancing themselves from self-identified fundamentalists because the latter were content to separate from the culture and focus their activism on evangelism.

This narrative has been an important part of evangelical self-conception since Henry wrote his manifesto. Many historians—especially those with evangelical sympathies—have advanced this interpretation, though perhaps with a bit more nuance. I will confess that I have been shaped by this interpretation, and it has informed both my teaching and my scholarship. Madison Trammel is among the growing number of historians who call this narrative into question. He believes the dominant historiography relies too much upon Henry's original diagnosis and the influential works of George Marsden and Joel Carpenter. He argues that fundamentalists did not go into hiding after Scopes, and nobody at the time thought they had.

In *Fundamentalists in the Public Square: Evolution, Alcohol, and Culture Wars after the Scopes Trial*, a revision of Trammel's dissertation, the author demonstrates that in at least two cases fundamentalists remained committed to faith-motivated cultural engagement in the years following Scopes. Notably,

fundamentalists continued to agitate against the normalization of Darwinism in public schools and the wider culture. Fundamentalists also organized to oppose the repeal of the Eighteenth Amendment, which prohibited the manufacture, sale, and transportation of hard liquor.

To make his case, Trammel examines newspapers from the four most populous states at the time: New York, Pennsylvania, Illinois, and Ohio. He also focuses on the years 1920 to 1933, identifying trends on either side of Scopes. The takeaway is that there was far more continuity than discontinuity. Major papers did not treat Scopes as a humiliating defeat for fundamentalists, though H. L. Mencken did his best to lampoon them during this period. There was no significant difference between how fundamentalists engaged with evolution or alcohol during the period under consideration. There was no fundamentalist retreat.

In addition to his research into newspapers, Trammel also dedicates a lengthy chapter to dispensationalist theology and its implications for social action. Following historians such as Ernest Sandeen and Matthew Avery Sutton, Trammel acknowledges that premillennialism was central to interwar fundamentalism, and dispensationalism had an outsized influence among premillennialists. Dispensational views of human nature, sin, personal redemption, ecclesiology, and eschatology contributed to a limited vision for social action. Rather than developing a robust theology of cultural engagement, fundamentalists "argued that the teaching of evolution and the legal sale of alcohol frayed the country's moral fiber, leading to negative consequences for the nation and its citizens" (p. 123).

Trammel never suggests that fundamentalists did not eventually begin withdrawing from cultural engagement. He suspects many did, though that is beyond the scope of the present study. Trammel attributes any shift in posture, however, primarily to the deaths of highly engaged fundamentalist public figures such as William Jennings Bryan and John Roach Stratton, not the Scopes Trial. Another factor is the legacy of Inherit the Wind, which has shaped our cultural memory of Scopes.

Trammel also does not argue that Henry's famous critique was entirely wrong. Rather, it was too simplistic, though likely for strategic reasons. Henry wanted born-again Protestants to be engaged on a wider range of issues than most fundamentalists would countenance. This led him to frame *The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism* as a call to abandon the retreat and return to the field of battle. Henry was critiquing the sort of limited theology of culture that could arise from dispensationalist assumptions.

Fundamentalists in the Public Square is not a comprehensive study of fundamentalist cultural engagement, but it never claims to be. Trammel's goals are modest yet focused: to demonstrate that on two of the most controversial issues in America, during the years directly before and after the Scopes Trial, fundamentalists remained steadfastly committed to faith-motivated social activism. He accomplishes his goals admirably.

This is the sort of study that ought to inspire a raft of further research. What did fundamentalist cultural engagement look like between 1933 and 1947? Were there other issues besides alcohol and evolution that attracted fundamentalist attention? How did one's region affect his engagement? Were there denominational variations that impacted fundamentalist social ethics? These are questions for other historians to take up, encouraged by the stones that Trammel so skillfully overturns in the present study.

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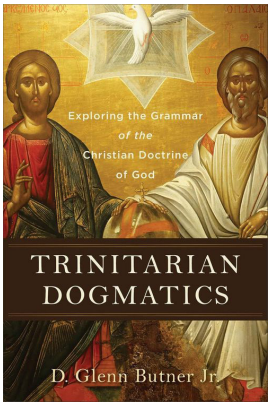
— SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY —

D. Glenn Butner Jr. *Trinitarian Dogmatics: Explorinvg the Grammar of the Christian Doctrine of God.* Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2022. xii + 288pp. £21.99/$32.00.



Delving into the mysteries of the Trinity is not a task to be taken lightly. At the very least, such an enterprise would require careful biblical exegesis, deep interaction with key historical sources, and astute deployment of theological reasoning. In *Trinitarian Dogmatics*, D. Glenn Butner Jr. employs all these qualities while presenting a unique, dialectic approach to the doctrine that begins with logically foundational concepts and progresses into more complex issues.

Butner delves into his investigation by exploring the complementary topics of consubstantiality (ch. 1) and processions and personal properties (ch. 2). Looking to the canonical development of the person of Jesus, Butner notes that Christ's mediatorial role and reception of worship clearly rise to the point where he is identified with God himself. Investigations of Basil of Caesarea, Thomas Aquinas, and historical Christian-Muslim dialogues further develop the balance of oneness and perceptibility. The topic of processions and personal properties begins with a defense of eternal generation. Origen anchored generation in immutability, implying a distinction between the Father and the Son while preserving unity of nature. Thomas Aquinas further develops divine processions with his doctrine of analogy, buffering generation from becoming a mere act of creation. Following the biblical narrative yields further support that the Son and Spirit have "unique, intimate, ordered, and differentiated relations with the Father" (p. 70).

Chapters 3 and 4 address the topics of simplicity and persons/relations, respectively. Butner surveys four common approaches to divine simplicity (conceptual distinction, virtual distinction, formal distinction, and apophatic). He then moves toward a biblical defense of the doctrine, demonstrating simplicity via scripture's affirmation of Jesus as God while eschewing divine hierarchy and preserving singularity. Logically, the doctrine remains coherent so long as the relationality of the Godhead avoids introducing compositional distinctions. Moving into the next chapter, Butner sets forth six parameters which must be met for defining divine personhood: rationality, dissimilarity, Christological compatibility, relationality, unity, and uniqueness. Drawing from these categories, he describes a divine person as "a unique subsistence of the singular and rational divine nature that is distinguished from yet inseparably united with the other divine persons by the divine relations" (p. 127).

Butner's third juxtaposition covers perichoresis (ch. 5) and missions (ch. 6). He investigates three common metaphors for perichoresis: the divine dance, mutual indwelling, and unity of love, consciousness, and will. Bringing Moltmann into the discussion raises more questions regarding the dogmatic function of this doctrine, especially differentiating it from union with Christ. Ultimately, perichoresis differs from union with Christ in the aspects of duration, extent, ontology, and symmetry. Regarding missions, Butner brings Irenaeus into dialogue with 21st century theology to show that the divine missions reveal God through creation in a cataphatic mode. Unlike processions, missions

are contingent, non-exhaustive acts of God's self-revelation and communication. The doctrine of perichoresis grounds salvation itself as a thoroughly trinitarian work.

The final coupling covers inseparable operations (ch. 7) and communion (ch. 8). Butner establishes the biblical warrant for inseparable operations by demonstrating that there is a single divine power operating in a threefold form. To dispel the objection that inseparable operations destroy personal distinctions, Butner argues that the doctrine applies to origin and relation rather than nature or rank. Furthermore, the doctrine of appropriations associates attributes and acts with a particular divine person, bolstering the ability to distinguish divine persons while maintaining a single divine operation. As he draws his investigation to a close, Butner explores three different models of communion: co-ordinate, linear, and incorporative, with each having its distinct benefits. The co-ordinate model encourages prayer and worship that directly addresses each person of the Trinity. The linear model shows how all three persons are united in their work. The incorporative model emphasizes the indwelling presence of the Spirit. All of this shows the fundamental importance of the doctrine of the Trinity, directing the church to worship God in spirit and in truth.

Trinitarian Dogmatics is a staggering accomplishment of dogmatic theology. Butner's own stated intent was "to write a systematic account of the Trinity that is normed by Scripture and shaped by centuries of polemical debates … to create instruction that benefits the church" (p. 3). Mission accomplished! The breadth and depth of Butner's scriptural interpretation and historical investigations are truly impressive and will undoubtedly be a resource worth returning to time and again.

Butner's documentation and eye toward teaching also make this a helpful resource in advanced theological education. Each chapter concludes with an annotated bibliography, several of which include majority world voices. This rich sourcing, in itself, makes *Trinitarian Dogmatics* a vital resource in Trinitarian theology. The glossary in the back matter is also a welcome addition that will benefit students as they parse through a variety of detailed terminology.

Butner's proficiency also makes it difficult to find a proper home for this work. His meticulous arguments and broad historical acumen call for a highly learned audience that would potentially lie beyond the stated intent of being "targeted to the seminary and to other graduate-level classrooms" (p. 2). In addition, the interconnected of the various theological *loci* prevents each chapter from exhaustively addressing its given topic. The reader must carefully trace that topic as it resurfaces throughout the book in order to glean its full import. That being said, such an approach to reading *Trinitarian Dogmatics* will be well worth the effort. It is a rich resource that will undoubtedly benefit the academy and the church.

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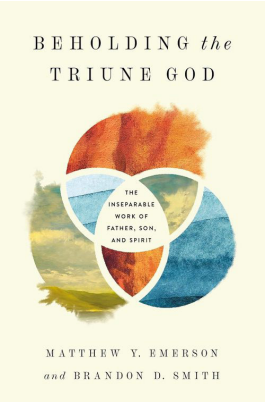
Matthew Y. Emerson and Brandon D. Smith, *Beholding the Triune God: The Inseparable Work of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.* Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2024. 142 pp. £13.99/$18.99.



As pastors teach on the riches of Trinitarian theology and the glory of God's nature, they can often hit a speed bump when they turn to consider "inseparable operations." Augustine's maxim, *opera trinitatis ad extra indivisa sunt,* seems simple enough until you try to explain it. It is an idea which stretches the ability of our minds to understand adequately, and might appeal to clash with, the Biblical witness. Two theologically minded New Testament scholars from Oklahoma Baptist University, Matthew Emerson and Brandon Smith, have added a very helpful, lay-level resource for engaging in that topic. As they state in the introduction, "the way we talk about God's acts often divides the persons of God in a way that is contrary to our confession that God is one God in three persons." (p. 3).

Emerson and Smith work through eight theological *loci* and explore how the Godhead is at work within each: revelation, providence, creation, salvation, mission, communion, sanctification, and judgment. Each chapter follows the same general pattern of first looking at the unity of action in the given *locus* and then looking at how it is most properly *appropriated* to a certain member of the Godhead. The first four and sanctification are expected to be covered in the given volume, but it was a pleasant surprise to see mission, communion, and judgment included. These three connect the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit to the day-to-day lives of believers, which many can find missing. Not only is the Triune God the source of our salvation but the ground of our new life in Christ, even the sphere in which we now live as we are welcomed into the fellowship of divine life.

A major strength of this book is its biblical focus. The temptation to solely review the pronouncements of previous theologians on this subject is considerable, yet such an approach, although valuable, frequently results in the conflation of systematic and historical theology. Emerson and Smith make use of noted theologians, but their chief concern is to examine and exegete the text of Scripture (over 300 citations). This is precisely where the reader should start. Throughout the witness of Scripture, we see that a proper reading pushes towards a place of both "Trinitarian unity and … Trinitarian distinction." (p. 124).

One area of disagreement emerged from my reading of their chapter on salvation. The chapter provides a compelling exposition of the triune foundations of salvation as witnessed in the Bible. However, the authors' response to the question, "Did God turn His face away?" presents a difficulty. As a result of specific contemporary hymns, it is a prevalent belief among members of the church that a separation occurred within the Godhead during Christ's crucifixion. While the authors rightly resist and push back against such a view, their answer is less than satisfying. When Christ quotes Psalm 22:1 from the cross, the authors say he is "most likely … identifying with the afflicted King David…" (p. 70). Their Trinitarian, Christological, and canonical perspectives are invaluable in approaching this matter. This is a better answer than some sort of schism within the triune life. Stating it this way, however, seems to place the typological arrow in the wrong direction. Is it mere identification with David? Or can a better answer be found in the human experience of Christ on the cross as the fullness of his (seeming)

abandonment by God, a God who has already promised that he will never leave nor forsake us? (Deut 31:6).

If there is a weakness to this book, it is that it is limited to being an introductory text. It would work well as Sunday School material and with those first diving into theological studies, and it should leave someone desiring to go only deeper (surely as the authors intended!), but they would need to turn elsewhere (such as Adonis Vidu's *The Same God Who Works All Things* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2021]). However, for those first introduced to this strange idea of "inseparable operations" or those wishing to have a cogent introduction for a group of interested church members, this would be an excellent resource. Clearly written, biblically focused, this work provides the right prescription to help us behold our Triune God across the whole scope of our lives.

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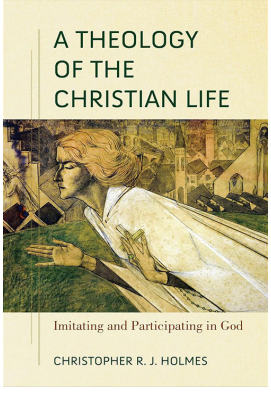
Christopher R. J. Holmes. *A Theology of the Christian Life: Imitating and Participating in God.* Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2021. vii + 171 pp. £19.99/$28.00.



Work in the area of classical theology aimed at biblical faithfulness and historic connectedness continues to come from academic printing presses at an astonishing rate, a blessing for which we can be truly thankful. One of those inherent blessings is the reminder that our theology is not meant to be divorced from our moral formation; rather, they are to be wed in blissful harmony, as God would have it. Meditating on Scripture, contemplating the glory, beauty, greatness, and goodness of God makes us into a certain kind of people (Ps 1:1–6; 2 Cor 3:18; Eph 5:1; 1 Pet 1:13–16).

Another example of such a volume comes from Christopher R. J. Holmes, Professor of Theology at the University of Otago, author of several other theological works. Holmes, maintaining that theology is both theoretical (i.e., contemplative) and practical, argues that "God's existence, perfection, infinity, and immutability form a wellspring for Christian life" (p. ix). Highlighting the doctrine of God as "fertile ground for Christian life," he asserts we should see the Christian life in "utterly theocentric terms, for conceiving Christian life as a pilgrimage toward ever greater likeness to God in and through Jesus Christ, in order that his Father, our Father, might, in the Spirit, be 'all in all' (1 Cor. 15:28)" (pp. xvi–xvii).

Holmes's treatment is a prime example of "biblical reasoning," as coined by John Webster, wherein the author treats God's names (i.e., attributes) with a view to our imitation and participation. Holmes wants to describe what these attributes say about God and what kind of life they call us to, both now and in eternity. The book has two parts, the first five chapters dealing with God's existence, perfection, infinity, and immutability (questions arise here, as often such attributes are thought of as incommunicable, though Holmes treats such matters with care). In the second section, the author touches on how these attributes of God inform our understanding of the hypostatic union, virtue, and the church. Each chapter focuses on a particular passage of Scripture to frame the discussion, as well

as a particular historic theologian to offer guidance along the way (e.g., Augustine, Gregory of Nyssa, Origen, Maximus the Confessor, Aquinas, etc.).

The aim of the book is clear. Holmes rightly recognizes theology as both descriptive and prescriptive. That is, "It not only describes the mystery of God revealed in the Holy Scriptures, but also promotes the movement of the heart, soul, and mind toward God" (p. 155). As theologians, then, we want ourselves to be stimulated and so exhort others toward formation in Christ by meditating on the Word of God, engaging in the life of the church, and offering prayers in the form of praise, confession, and supplication (particularly, that we would know and love God). This is a right and clear emphasis, one which would be appreciated in more theological works as we consider the object and aim of our study and affection.

Holmes speaks much throughout the book concerning imitation and participation. These twin themes are indeed receiving more attention in the evangelical theological world, and this is right and good as they are constrained by the testimony of Scripture. Holmes speaks clearly on such matters; however, explicitly defining such terms would help rightly affirm the author's argument. A case in point, the language of participation can be used in this work at times that would seem to indicate that what awaits us in the new creation is a kind of deification or *theosis* that makes us one with God in an essential sense. Holmes repeatedly appeals to his readers to maintain the Creator-creature distinction throughout the work, but clearer definitions and explanations at points could have strengthened his argument.

Also, while Scripture is appealed to throughout the work, further attention could have been given to more detailed contextual exegesis. Interaction with historic figures proved immensely helpful, the author even indicating at points where he held his own uncertainty about the precise nature of what they were arguing. As such, readers are exposed to retrieval done in a responsible and contextual way, modeling a good path for such studies. Again, it simply seems that at certain points of his work, greater detail could have been given to that which grounds all of our theology, namely, the exegesis of Scripture. Holmes offers other theologians a number of texts within which such work could be done, for which we should be thankful.

One final strength of this book, while others could certainly be adumbrated, is its focus toward the latter chapters, which argue that virtue is found within the life of the church. Holmes, rightly, does not allow for detached observations of God but rather argues that such meditation and contemplation will result in virtue, particularly love. It is in this way that we are called to imitate God and participate by grace in who he is. The theologian must speak of God in a way that stems from a heart of love steeped in the pursuit of God's character that will be lived out perfectly, eternally.

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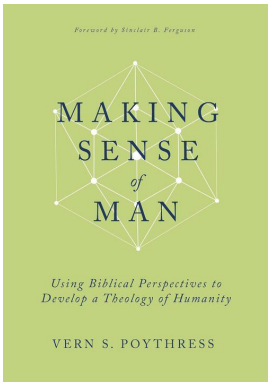
Vern Poythress. *Making Sense of Man: Using Biblical Perspectives to Develop a Theology of Humanity.* Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2024. xvii + 759 pp. £44.60/$49.99.



Poythress, distinguished professor of New Testament, biblical interpretation, and systematic theology at Westminster Theological Seminary and author of numerous books, has provided a clearly articulated, well-argued, and in-depth exposition of the doctrine of man from a Reformed perspective.

The book is divided into seven parts, followed by four appendices, which cover such topics as the doctrine of man in the Westminster Standards and the doctrine of man grounded in the Trinity. Part 1 (chs. 1–6) sets the stage for the remainder of the book, addressing the interpretation of Genesis 1–3, the concept of the "image of God," and humanity's origin and moral state before the fall. Part 2 (chs. 7–8) gives attention to interpretative and hermeneutical principles. Part 3 (chs. 9–13) burrows into some key aspect of the doctrine of man, such as the temporal nature of humanity and the prelapsarian condition of man. Part 4 (chs. 14–20) explores humanity's composite nature, i.e., body and soul. Part 5 (chs. 21–26) focuses on the implications of God's prelapsarian covenant with Adam. In Part 6 (chs. 27–31), Poythress expounds on human sexuality and the notion of free agency. In part 7 (chs. 32–35), the final section of the book, Poythress delves into the state of man after the fall and the nature of sin. In a book of this length, there is a tremendous amount that could be said; however, considering the limitations of space, this review will focus on some key aspects.

Though Poythress writes from an explicitly Reformed perspective, this does not imply endorsement of every Reformed writer. For instance, he takes issue with Barth's relational understanding of the "image of God." Barth is correct in associating the image of God with the ability of relationality, but he misses the mark by over-inflating this one aspect at the expense of others. Concerning G. C. Berkouwer, Poythress believes that his "position shows an understandable concern to stress the holistic character of man's relation to God and the dynamic, obedient character of this relation" (p. 204). Yet, much like Barth's error, the author sees Berkouwer as overemphasizing the dynamic perspective of the image of God, favoring only "the analogy of breaking" and restoration" (p. 205). Later, in his discussion of human freedom, Poythress takes issue with Jonathan Edwards's formulation of freedom as deciding according to one's "strongest motive" (p. 528). While recognizing that Edwards attempts to solve the dilemma existing between freedom and necessity by appealing to "moral causes and natural causes" (p. 537), Poythress argues it is unclear how this distinction solves the dilemma since it does not sufficiently demonstrate how causation, whether moral or physical, makes sense of human responsibility.

Poythress's engagement with the aforementioned thinkers brings out a clear strength of this book, namely, his use of various analogies to elucidate the various topics under consideration. To begin with, following the linguist Kenneth L. Pike, he employs three different perspectives for expositing the doctrine of man: (1) "particle," or "stable wholes," (2) "wave," which emphasize the dynamic aspect of humanity, and (3) "field," that is, "a system of relations" (p. 122). Rather than prioritizing ontological, functional, or relational aspects of human nature, Poythress sees each of these as different perspectives on the same phenomenon.

Moreover, Poythress appeals to the "law of Christ" (*Lex Christi*) as a framework for drawing out the implications of his study. While it is not possible to reproduce this framework here, it suffices to note that Poythress builds on an analogical use of the Decalogue to understand the various topics covered within the doctrine of man. For instance, regarding the first commandment, "[y]ou shall have no other gods before me" (Exod 20:3), he notes how it points to (1) God as "supreme" (p. 142), which then leads humans to resemble God by being "supreme among earth [*sic*] creatures" (p. 149) and by magnifying his supremacy. United with Christ, who perfectly reflects God's supreme power, we too share in his reign, escaping sin's dominance. Using and applying the *Lex Christi* is the greatest strength of this book, given its ability to tie together and draw out the implications of our humanity in relation to God in Christ.

Poythress also cogently argues that such terms as "image of God," "spirit," and "soul" are best categorized as ordinary speech rather than technical and, as such, theologians fall into error by making these and other terms specialized, effectively ignoring the semantic range of their meaning. Following this, Poythress draws from the strengths of each perspective on the meaning of "image of God" without maintaining their weaknesses. Hence, he is able to offer a clear, sound defense of such doctrines as the intermediate state, the indistinguishability between spirit and soul, as well as to recognize the strengths of each explanation of original sin. To conclude, Poythress's sound and sophisticated yet accessible treatment of the doctrine of man makes it an essential reference work for any student.

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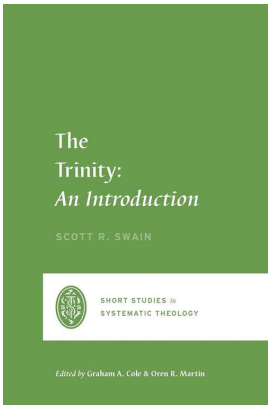
Scott R. Swain. *The Trinity: An Introduction*. Short Studies in Systematic Theology. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2020. 154 pp. £13.86/$15.99.



One notable contribution arising from the recent interest in Trinitarian theology is Scott R. Swain's *The Trinity: An Introduction*. Swain, who serves as president and professor of theology at Reformed Theological Seminary in Orlando, Florida, acknowledges that the controversy surrounding the proposal of the eternal functional subordination of the Son partly inspired this work. He is careful, however, to emphasize that the book is not merely a reactionary response to those debates.

Swain's introduction commences with an emphasis on the praise and adoration of the triune God, framing the discussion in a doxological context. By beginning with Christian prayer and worship directed toward the Trinity, Swain seeks to orient the reader toward a posture of humility, preparing them to engage with the doctrine while grounding their thoughts and actions in the triune name of God. The core of the book centers on articulating a proper understanding of the foundational "grammar" of Trinitarian discourse. This "grammar" is rooted in sacred Scripture, which Swain identifies as the supreme normative source for theological reflection.

Rather than embarking on an abstract or historical exploration of Trinitarian dogma, Swain opts to focus this concise volume on the scriptural patterns of divine naming. This approach reflects the book's

limited scope but remains consistent with its aim of presenting an accessible and scripturally grounded introduction to the doctrine of the Trinity.

The opening chapter of *The Trinity* examines the foundational grammar of God's triune name, beginning with the sacrament of baptism. Swain highlights the baptismal formula in Matthew 28:19, where believers are baptized "in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit." Through a close analysis of this Trinitarian formula, Swain offers a theologically rich discourse that affirms the existence of one God while simultaneously identifying the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit as fully and equally divine. While the three persons share the same divine essence, their personal names serve to distinguish them from one another: "The three are truly identical with the one God, and they are truly distinct from each other" (p. 32). These distinctions are rooted in their relations of origin: the Father eternally begets the Son, and the Father and the Son eternally breathe forth the Spirit.

Chapter 2 extends this biblical examination of the grammar of God's triune name and provides a succinct summary of Trinitarian teaching. Swain identifies three categories of biblical texts that contribute to the doctrine of the Trinity: (1) *inner-Trinitarian conversation*, which captures the dialogue among the persons of the Trinity; (2) *cosmic framework* texts, which address the Trinity's relation to the cosmos, particularly in creation; and (3) *redemptive mission* texts, which explore the sending of the Son and Spirit in acts of redemption. The chapter concludes with a summary sketch of the biblical teaching on the Trinity, synthesizing these scriptural patterns to present a coherent account of the triune God.

Chapter 3 addresses the doctrine of divine simplicity, a concept historically affirmed by the majority of theologians prior to the 19th century yet often unfamiliar to the average believer. While some argue that the doctrine lacks explicit biblical support, Swain identifies divine simplicity with the oneness of God, asserting its necessity for an orthodox confession of the Trinity. He employs 1 John 1:5 as a proof text, presenting it as a foundational summary of the Christian understanding of divine simplicity. Much of the chapter relies on apophatic theology (negative theology), which describes God by negation, emphasizing what God is not. Although the complexity of divine simplicity makes the chapter challenging to follow—a difficulty that is perhaps inevitable—the doctrine serves as a crucial affirmation of the oneness of God. Swain uses simplicity to uphold both the identity of the three persons of the Trinity with the one God and the real distinctions among the persons of the Trinity.

The subsequent three chapters focus on the three persons of the Trinity, dedicating one chapter to each. These chapters explore the language, fundamental grammar, and naming conventions of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, alongside an examination of the nature of divine persons and the doctrinal controversies that have arisen in Trinitarian theology. Chapter 5 specifically addresses three historical controversies regarding the identity of the Son: modalism, subordinationism, and eternal functional subordination. The final two chapters of Swain's work explore the activity of the triune God and its implications for ministry and the Christian life, offering a practical application of Trinitarian theology. Similar to the structure of a Pauline epistle, which begins with doctrinal exposition and concludes with practical instruction, these chapters transition from orthodoxy to orthopraxy. Chapter 7 examines the triune nature of God's work, emphasizing the distinct yet unified roles of the divine persons in conducting the work of the Trinity. Chapter 8 reflects on the ultimate purpose of God's triune work, identifying God himself as its supreme end, while highlighting that his children are its primary beneficiaries. The sacraments and the preaching of the Word are the means by which believers participate in the covenant community's blessings. Specifically, the sacraments of the Lord's Supper

and baptism "signify and seal" the promises revealed in Scripture, serving as tangible expressions of the triune God's grace.

Swain's book serves as a concise introduction to the doctrine of the Trinity, reflecting its inclusion in the *Short Studies in Systematic Theology* series. Comprising only 119 pages, the work can be read in a single afternoon. Its greatest strength lies in its clarity and focus, offering a biblically grounded exploration of the Trinity through the scriptural patterns of divine naming. By providing a succinct yet faithful survey of one of the church's most foundational doctrines, Swain offers a valuable resource for those seeking a deeper understanding of Trinitarian theology.

The book's primary weakness is also its inherent limitation. In crafting a concise introduction, the author must make deliberate decisions about what to include and, perhaps even more critically, what to exclude. By focusing on the scriptural patterns and grammatical framework of the triune God, the brevity of the text precludes a comprehensive historical survey of the doctrine of the Trinity. Additionally, the book does not present a fully developed model of the Trinity or offer a detailed philosophical analysis of Trinitarian dogmatics. For instance, while Swain effectively elucidates the internal grammar for naming the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit—emphasizing the eternal processions of the Son and the Spirit—the metaphysical implications of these processions remain unexplored. Readers seeking a more philosophically and theologically robust model of the Trinity will need to consult other specialized works. To that end, Swain includes a "Further Reading" appendix, offering a curated list of resources for those wishing to delve deeper into Trinitarian theology. The book also features a short, albeit incomplete, glossary of selected terms, along with a comprehensive general and Scripture index.

Written from a distinctly Reformed theological perspective, the book is designed to serve as an accessible resource for studied laypersons and beginning theology students. It aims to provide a biblically grounded introduction to the doctrine of the Trinity, equipping readers with the language and grammar to articulate the union of the eternal God, who exists as three distinct persons. By prioritizing Scripture as the guiding norm, Swain presents a theologically sound foundation for those seeking to engage with the Trinity from a biblical standpoint.

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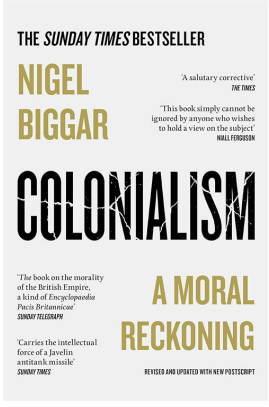
— ETHICS AND PASTORALIA —

Nigel Biggar. *Colonialism: A Moral Reckoning*. London: Collins, 2023. 480 pp. £12.99/$21.99.



Nigel Biggar's *Colonialism: A Moral Reckoning* is a courageous and timely intervention into contemporary debates about the British Empire and the broader history of colonisation. Written by the Regius Professor Emeritus of Moral Theology at the University of Oxford, this book addresses what Elie Kedourie calls "the canker of imaginary guilt" and challenges prevailing assumptions that colonialism was an unmitigated evil. Instead, the recently elevated Lord Biggar carefully evaluates the historical and moral complexities of the colonial enterprise, offering a measured and thoughtful analysis that will be of great interest to all who are concerned with history, ethics, and public discourse.

From the beginning, Biggar shuns the simplistic narrative that colonialism was systematically oppressive and driven by greed and racism. Rather, he argues that colonialism encompassed a range of motives, combining profound injustice with instances of benevolence and progress. This skewers some of the postcolonial orthodoxies that portray colonialism exclusively in negative moral terms. Moreover, he highlights the moral agency of historical actors and underscores the importance of historical accuracy in ethical judgments. This emphasis is particularly relevant in contemporary contexts grappling with misinformation, political polarisation, and the reductionist tendencies of social media. Biggar's work reminds readers that the moral evaluation of history must be undertaken with a sympathetic appreciation for historical context, avoiding anachronistic condemnations that fail to acknowledge the complexities of human motivation and action. For instance, he contends that historical curiosity and careful moral deliberation are necessary when assessing past attitudes toward violence through the lens of contemporary Western standards (p. 9).

The book is structured into eight chapters, each addressing key moral and historical dimensions of colonialism. Chapter 1 ("Motives, Good and Bad") challenges the notion that the British Empire was driven by a singular motive—whether exploitation or altruism. While this reviewer, as a Tudor church historian, might question some of Biggar's interpretations of Elizabethan ecclesiastical realities, his historical summaries effectively illuminate the multifaceted nature of British imperial motives. Chapter 2 ("From Slavery to Anti-Slavery") severs the naïve equation of colonisation with the presence of slavery by surveying the ancient and universal presence of slavery (e.g., from Mesopotamia to the Mediterranean, from the Incans to Islamic societies, and from China to the Barbary Coast) and by showing the extraordinary—though imperfect—leadership of the British (especially British evangelicals) from the late eighteenth-century to abolish the slave trade. He concludes that equating British colonialism with slavery, as some anticolonial narratives do, requires "amnesia about everything that has happened since 1787" (p. 65). He argues that as the British Empire expanded, anti-slavery rather than slavery became central to imperial policy.

Chapter 3 ("Human Equality, Cultural Superiority and 'Racism'") addresses whether the British Empire was fundamentally racist. Here, Biggar provides a nuanced discussion of the concepts of race and culture, arguing that moral judgments about cultural differences need not be racist if they are based on developmental disparities rather than biological determinism (p. 70). Chapter 4 ("Land, Settlers

and 'Conquest'") explores the ethical dilemmas surrounding colonial settlement, including questions of rights, sovereignty, and legal jurisdiction.

Chapter 5 ("Cultural Assimilation and 'Genocide'") asks whether British colonialism involved genocide. Focusing primarily on Canada and Australia, Biggar engages with the work of historians such as Henry Reynolds, critiquing instances where sources have been misquoted or accounts exaggerated. While this chapter touches on sensitive issues, it highlights the need for careful historical scrutiny. Chapter 6 ("Free Trade, Investment and 'Exploitation'") interrogates the claim that colonialism was primarily exploitative. Biggar presents evidence that colonial administrations invested heavily in infrastructure, legal systems, and education, laying the foundations for future economic development in many regions. While he does not absolve colonial powers of economic injustices, he situates them within a broader historical and moral framework.

Chapter 7 ("Government, Legitimacy and Nationalism") considers whether British rule was inherently illegitimate and harmful to native interests. Biggar challenges the assumption that nationalist resistance was the inevitable response to ineffective British administration. He contends that such a view overlooks the complexities of governance and the degree of indigenous cooperation. As he notes, "Colonial rule would not have been possible at all without the widespread acquiescence, participation, and cooperation of native peoples" (p. 213). Chapter 8 ("Justified Force and 'Pervasive Violence'") scrutinises six of the most infamous episodes of British imperial military violence, including the First Opium War, the Second Anglo-Boer War, and the Indian Mutiny. While acknowledging the moral failures in these cases, Biggar argues that colonial governments typically repudiated such violence rather than institutionalised it (p. 272). Thus, he challenges the notion that violence was intrinsic to British colonial expansion.

Despite the book's many strengths, it is not without its challenges. Some readers may feel that Biggar underplays certain aspects of colonial exploitation or is too willing to defend the motivations of colonial administrators. Others may argue that his approach, while historically rigorous (with over 100 pages of footnotes), does not sufficiently account for the enduring structural inequalities that emerged from the colonial period. Yet even those who disagree with Biggar's conclusions should recognise that his work is a valuable contribution to the ongoing discussion about the legacy of colonialism.

Biggar's willingness to challenge anticolonial assumptions has made his work controversial in some quarters. His qualified defense of Cecil Rhodes in 2015 and 2016 placed him at the center of debates over Britain's imperial past, leading to the six-year "Ethics and Empire" research project, which began in 2017. This initiative drew criticism from around sixty Oxford students and modern historians, who publicly rejected his views. As someone who was studying in Oxford during this period, I recall attending a Latin class at Oriel College where the fate of the Rhodes statue overlooking High Street was a topic of discussion. Stepping outside afterward, I encountered a rather lackluster "Rhodes Must Fall" protest in Oriel Square—one of its lead chanters, I later heard, was a Rhodes Scholar. Intrigued by the debate, I subsequently borrowed a biography of Rhodes from the Bodleian Library to investigate the matter further. All this reinforced my conviction that evidence-based research is essential for the moral evaluation of colonial history. Biggar's book meets much of this need, offering a compelling call for nuanced moral evaluation. I am therefore very grateful for Professor Biggar's book and trust that others

who take up and read it may be stimulated, sharpened, and strengthened to seek the truth, speak with wisdom, and act with courage.

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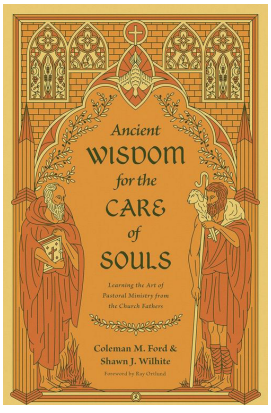
Coleman M. Ford and Shawn J. Wilhite. *Ancient Wisdom for the Care of Souls: Learning the Art of Pastoral Ministry from the Church Fathers*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2024. 234 pp. £17.99/$23.99.



In *Ancient Wisdom for the Care of Souls*, Coleman Ford and Shawn Wilhite draw on the insights of the Church Fathers to offer a fresh, historically rooted vision for modern pastoral ministry. Their patristic expertise enables them to see important connections between historical theology and contemporary pastoral concerns. The book, therefore, covers both church history and pastoral theology and, in order to show the relevance of the former for the latter, is sprinkled throughout with practical application (e.g., busyness, sermon preparation, scheduling, etc.).

The authors propose a "classical vision" of pastoral ministry built around five pillars: classical theology, virtue, spiritual formation, local focus, and soul care (pp. 7–8, 218–20). This vision pushes back against popular models of pastors as managers or strategists focused primarily on organizational growth (pp. 9–10). In contrast to many contemporary voices, they emphasize the pastor's role as a doctor of the soul. The book, organized into three sections (spirituality, theology, and ministry), addresses the topics of humility, spiritual formation, sacramentality, textual skill, biblical theology, Christocentrism, theological formation, Trinitarianism, contemplative practices, and preaching. Each chapter pairs a selected theme with the life and teachings of a particular Church Father.

The themes Ford and Wilhite emphasize stand out compared to many modern pastoral books which often leave pastors skilled in the latest business practices but deficient in the central tenets of the faith. The authors show how trinitarian theology, prosopological interpretation, and partitive exegesis are not conversations of a bygone era but central to understanding God and ourselves. While leadership strategies and management skills may have a place in pastoral training, the authors stress that virtues like humility and spiritual formation should take precedence. The priority a pastor places on these elements reveals much about their understanding of ministry.

Some pastors might wonder what second- or third-century church leaders have to offer the modern church. Not bound by contemporary concerns, the Church Fathers offer much-needed perspective. Their temporal and cultural distance allows pastors to step back from current trends and assumptions, helping them distinguish timeless (as opposed to timebound) ministry principles. By engaging with diverse cultural situations from the past, pastors can see how theology was applied in different contexts and better understand how to apply it today. As the authors explain: "Theology should not be purely contextual … but it is always contextualized, applying the timeless truth of God's word to the timely situations of God's people" (p. 149).

In a genre too often dominated by business jargon and pragmatic shortcuts, Ford and Wilhite advocate a deeply theological approach to pastoral ministry. Despite the book's practical focus, the depth of research and potential for further study are evident from the introduction to the footnotes. How much the reader appreciates their "broad, biblical theology of worship" and "charitable view of church history" will no doubt depend on their personal convictions and philosophy of ministry (p. 54). They also engage widely with a variety of contemporary voices—e.g., John Webster, Dallas Willard, Peter Kreeft, Eugene Peterson, Peter Scazzero, Herman Bavinck, Martin Lloyd-Jones, Richard Foster, and more. They are unafraid to engage topics as diverse as Nicene Trinitarianism, exegetical method, expository preaching, and contemplative spirituality.

Along the way, they include helpful and interesting historical summaries of various church fathers, offering the necessary background to their writings. For example, the brief explanation of traditional Roman religious attitudes provides illuminating context for understanding Augustine's *Confessions* (p. 143). In addition, the theological discussions are richly articulated and compelling, including a poignant description of the purpose and power of the Lord's Supper and its significance in the believer's life (pp. 56–57).

The book's weaknesses do not lie in its vision of pastoral ministry, historical depth, or theological substance but rather in the limitations of its scope. A book as ambitious as this—which attempts to do justice to ten church fathers as diverse as Irenaeus and Chrysostom, as controversial as Origen, and as prolific as Augustine—inevitability faces challenges. While the authors do not claim comprehensiveness, their selectivity is noticeable. For example, they engage Augustine on his interior life and ordered love of God but avoid discussing his views on baptismal regeneration or purgatory, which many evangelicals find problematic. Similarly, Gregory the Great is discussed for his pastoral care and humility but not his views on asceticism or celibacy. This selective approach fits the book's aim, which is to expand the conversation while focusing on core doctrinal commitments and leaving aside speculative elements. But, in my view, glossing over the theological complexity of many of the church fathers weakens the book's potential to offer a genuinely classical vision of pastoral ministry.

Therefore, the degree to which the authors' vision of pastoral ministry can be considered truly classical is open to debate. Their approach is undoubtedly informed by classical principles and is comparatively classical within the broader evangelical landscape. However, integrating certain modern elements might strike some readers as a departure from the traditional model, while omitting other classical elements may feel like an oversight. This tension raises essential questions about retrieval: Do modern pastoral impulses shape their vision more than the church fathers themselves? Or does the classical vision offer a corrective to modern priorities? These dynamics are not easily untangled, as both ancient and contemporary influences interact in ways both constructive and conflicting. Even so, the vision they present—though eclectic—has a distinct beauty, showcasing how timeless wisdom can engage contemporary pastoral challenges. Whether the church fathers themselves would approve of this selective synthesis, however, is another question entirely.

The breadth of content, eras, and theological disputes covered inevitably results in more cursory treatment of some topics (e.g., the ὁμοούσιος vs. ὁμοιούσιος debate, p. 124). This occasionally creates an uneven style. For instance, the chapter on theology arguably discusses Webster more than Augustine and the role of friendship in pastoral ministry more than theological formation. Similarly, the chapter on preaching almost treats Chrysostom as another example alongside Augustine and Gregory the Great, rather than the central figure. Even with Chrysostom, the focus veers peculiarly into a discussion

of singleness and marriage, illustrating a different point from the chapter's main argument. Likewise, the chapter on Athanasius and Christ-centered ministry excessively discusses Antony and asceticism. While this makes some sense, as *The Life of Antony* was one of Athanasius's most famous works, it shifts the discussion away from the chapter's main focus. In a popular work covering such a vast amount of history and theology, it is understandable that the authors might venture down a few side paths. There is a risk in doing so, however. But thankfully, Ford and Wilhite never lose the plot.

In the end, the authors successfully illustrate a vision of pastoral ministry that draws on the wisdom of the past, using an array of ancient voices in conversation with a diverse group of modern thinkers. This work offers a valuable and timely retrieval of classical pastoral theology, enriching the understanding of the pastoral vocation while addressing contemporary evangelical challenges.

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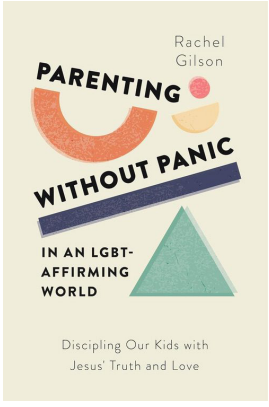
Rachel Gilson. *Parenting Without Panic in an LGBT Affirming World: Discipling Our Kids with Jesus' Truth and Love*. Epsom: Good Book, 2024. 113 pp. £8.99/$14.99.



Many years ago, when I was on "kinder duty" in my daughter's class, the teacher asked the children what they could tell her about Christmas. My child shot up her hand and blurted out proudly, "Santa's not real!" All eyes turned disapprovingly to me, and in coming weeks I had to answer questions from parents as to why my "anti-Santa-evangelist" had made it her mission to convert the entire grade! These days the stakes are much higher for Christian parents and their children, as our perspectives on sexuality cut sharply against the grain of societal norms.

This hit home for Rachel Gilson when she discovered that her daughter's female kindergarten teacher was married to another woman and was concerned how her daughter would respond (p. 9). This is what prompted Gilson, author of *Born Again This Way: Coming Out, Coming to Faith, and What Comes Next* (Epsom: Good Book, 2021), to write *Parenting Without Panic*. Her aim is to help parents fearlessly communicate God's beautiful vision of sexuality to their children and assist them to navigate the strong opposing currents of LGBT+ ideology. Gilson's perspective is particularly insightful because she herself experiences same-sex attraction and swam in that stream as an atheist, until in college she was "confronted with the gospel" and became a believer (p. 11).

Gilson urges parents to lead with the "Yes" of "God's Positive Vision" for human sexuality (ch. 1), in contrast to the negative view that many have grown up with (pp. 15–17). She argues that, while we do not need "overly complex conversations with our kids about theories of sex and gender," we can teach our children, even from a young age, to celebrate and thank God for the beautiful gift of their bodies, and that it is their body that shows them whether they are a boy or a girl (pp. 18–19).

Gilson also sees relationships as "signposts" which point to the bigger vision of "the goodness of God's forever family" (p. 20). Cautioning us to avoid unbiblical visions of both singleness and marriage (p. 20), including "salvation-by-romance" (p. 23), she reminds us that, while healthy marriages give "a glimmer of what the gospel is" (pp. 23–24), in eternity, "all of us will be single" (p. 21). Therefore, the

relationships between believers on earth are a potent vision for a watching world that is "longing for intimacy, for romance, and for connection … but [is] being sold a cheap, plastic imitation of the real thing" (p. 25).

In chapter 2 ("Sex Talk"), Gilson advises that "talking to our kids about sex early will help them in the long run" (p. 30) by guarding them against sexual abuse (p. 31); by establishing ourselves as trustworthy sources of knowledge (p. 31); and by giving our kids "a sturdy, true, and even beautiful" foundation for life (p. 33). She exhorts parents to use the correct terminology for body parts, because our children "don't need to be afraid or ashamed of the bodies God gave them" (p. 34).

In chapter 3 ("The Impact of the Fall"), Gilson gives a crash-course in transgenderism and same-sex attraction, clearly cautioning that "trying to live in opposition to how God made our bodies cannot bring lasting peace" (p. 48). She also helpfully addresses the reality of disorders of sexual development/intersex conditions and stresses the point that, while "all of our bodies face different troubles," God made our bodies good and "we all are worthy of love and respect" (p. 51). Consequently, "no matter what our body is like now, we can praise him, serve him, and thank him" (p. 52).

In regard to the "human longing for romantic love" and its fulfilment in marriage, Gilson writes that this is an "echo" of the "passionate, intoxicating, faithful love … which Jesus has for his people," but rightly adds that "other kinds of close relationships also echo God's great love for his people, including parent-child relationships, friendship and siblinghood within the church" (pp. 53–54). She concludes with three messages to keep communicating to our children: "that desires and feelings are not reliable"; that "romance is not the definition of the good life" (p. 56); and that "we need to talk about the positive design of marriage frequently, so that when we encounter false visions, we have the right thing to compare them to" (p. 57).

Gilson builds on this positive vision in chapter 4 ("Tools for LGBT+ Conversations") to demonstrate that authenticity and justice, so championed by LGBT+ advocates, essentially derive from a Christian worldview without the gospel (p. 69). She makes the compelling point that we should see ourselves "not as adversaries but as missionaries" (p. 70) and has devised a helpful "Yes-No-Yes" tool in order to teach kids how to respond to LGBT+ arguments: affirm points of connection, point out when something is destructive (p. 71), and show that "the gospel offers the only and best way to have true life" (p. 72).

In chapter 5 ("Fear Not"), Gilson addresses several underlying parental fears: that our children might have to pay the "real social cost" of a Christian sexual ethic now considered by society as "oppressive and harmful" (p. 80), that we ourselves might come to doubt whether "God's blessing and reward is more satisfying than the love and approval of the world" (p. 84), and whether our children will walk away from Jesus (p. 85). She encourages parents to trust God with their children, reassuring them that, just as Daniel resisted the pagan Babylonian culture he was submerged in, we can help our children resist the "myths, language … literature … idols … demands … and tactics" of our own culture (p. 87).

In chapter 6 ("In the Family"), Gilson provides guidance to parents whose children are led to affirm same-sex relationships, beginning with an overall framework that love is "only great when lived according to God's good rules" and that "the right way to love people of the same sex is in friendship" (p. 96). If teenagers disclose same-sex attraction to their parents, often after a desperate struggle or denial (p. 97), she counsels that parents must be "safe enough to talk to," should "treat this like any other area of temptation," and need to reassure their child of their love, compassion, and assistance (pp. 99–100). For teenagers who choose not to walk with Jesus, she wisely recommends that parents "prioritize talking

about Jesus and his offer of salvation over conversations about sexuality … because their primary need is reconciliation to the Lord" (p. 104).

Gilson more than achieves her purpose of equipping Christian parents to be proactive without being alarmed by the alternative visions of sexuality presented to their children and to embrace their role as guardians of God's positive vision for human sexuality. Although only a "little volume" (p. 102), Gilson's book is a gold nugget of practical, Bible-based wisdom, written with candour and humour, which skilfully condenses complex issues into simple explanations and clear, creative applications. Admittedly, it is more of an overview than a comprehensive manual, something Gilson herself notes in the conclusion. As such, it provides more of a starting point, offering general principles for parents of mainly younger children rather than specific answers for every question a parent might have (p. 111). For this, she wisely points to the church, and particularly other Christian parents who can "learn from each other without pride or despair" (p. 112).

With so much to commend it, and as an accessible, introductory guide for navigating LGBT+ issues, this book is a must for every church library.

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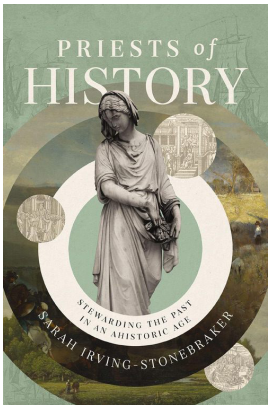
Sarah Irving-Stonebraker. *Priests of History: Stewarding the Past in an Ahistoric Age*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2024. 256 pp. £14.99/$19.99.



Dr Sarah Irving-Stonebraker is a fine speaker, an excellent writer, and a brilliant historian. So, it was with more than a sense of expectation and anticipation that I approached her latest book, *Priests of History.* As a history graduate, and someone who never stops reading history, I looked forward to her defense of history as a vital ingredient in the Christian life. I was not disappointed. *Priests of History* is a well written, stimulating, provocative, and wide-ranging discussion of the role of history in the modern Church.

Irving-Stonebraker summarises the purpose of the book this way: "Drawing upon my expertise as an academic historian and my experience as an atheist who became a Christian, *Priests of History* examines what history is and why it matters. I argue that engaging with history ought to be a central part of Christian formation and discipleship" (p. xxvi).

Priests of History does what it says on the tin. However, it is more than just a book about history. In that sense it is hard to categorize. As well as being a history book, it is also personal and autobiographical, political and theological, devotional and literary. It also includes a number of significant biographical accounts, such as those of William Cooper, Doug Nicholls, and Mary Prince.

Irving-Stonebraker argues that we struggle to make sense of history in today's church. Consequently, there is a growing rootlessness and spiritual malaise, and we far too often embrace elements of non-Christian culture. I have seen this work out in my own denomination where one discussion on a particular issue resulted in chaos, largely because people spoke only in the language and arguments of

the contemporary rather than noting both the historical and biblical applications of the subject under discussion.

The author is also right to point out how centuries of Christian doctrine can be too easily dismissed as "outdated dogma" (p. 44, citing Bishop Spong). Steve Chalke and Alan Mann's *The Lost Message of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004) is an example of how this is played out. They argue for a contemporary, "progressive" ideology in part by cherry picking the bits of history that reinforce their "found message."

The section on why history matters to Christians in an ahistoric age (ch. 5) is, to my mind, the most stimulating and useful of the book. Historical literacy is vital if Christians are to engage effectively with culture; it will not only help us in our evangelism but help us live more faithfully as disciples of Christ.

In another important section on recovering sacredness and beauty (ch. 10), Irving-Stonebraker makes a compelling case for an apologetic of beauty. However, the suggestion that if we are to reflect the beauty of God, then we should have beautiful buildings (p. 156), while understandable, is also questionable. Perhaps it depends on how beauty is defined, but I have been in many simple buildings where the beauty of Christ is manifestly displayed and some impressive cathedrals where he was distinctly absent!

Consistent with her appreciation of ecclesiastical history, Irving-Stonebraker argues for older practices such as catechizing, the church year, and community living. Her critique of the entertainment, consumerist, and trivialising culture of much contemporary Christianity is hard hitting—and true. "When pastors become CEOs, they no longer shepherd God's people; instead, they merely manage their staff" (p. 54).

My one question with this, however, is: Was it not ever thus? Did not the medieval church have its own form of entertainment culture? Does not history teach us that those doctrinal aberrations, selling out to the culture and playing political power games, have, like the poor, always been with us?

Along with my increasing appreciation of the strengths of this book, the more I have read it (and I have done so three times now) the more I have begun to question some of its basic arguments. Here are three examples.

First, is it really the case that the "contemporary secular worldview in the West is ahistorical at heart" (p. xxi)?

A couple of years ago I was part of a sell-out crowd at the Enmore Theatre in Sydney where hundreds of us (many young people) gathered to listen to two men, Tom Holland and Dominic Sandbrook, pontificate on history. I do not ever recall sell out tours by historians in my youth! Their podcast, "The Rest Is History," is one of the most popular in the world, and there are history books that sell millions. I find it hard to think of our age as an ahistorical age when I find myself discussing the History channel with my friendly neighborhood plumber!

I suspect that the general culture today is not much more ahistorical than it was fifty years ago. Perhaps the difference is that Irving-Stonebraker is dealing with the perception of history which is dominant in much of academia and the media (Dare I call it "woke history"?)—the type of history that has to be rewritten so that it meets all the current DEI requirements. But that is only one aspect of culture. The problem is just as much bad history as it is "ahistory."

As Irving-Stonebraker points out in the chapter on "History and Intellectual Formation" (ch. 11), the difficulty is largely with universities which operate on a business model (ironically while promoting an anti-capitalist facade). It is these institutions that have become consumer-oriented and are far more

likely to teach on race rather than democracy, identity rather than the enlightenment, and sex and sexuality rather than the Reformation (p. 177)!

The decline of history in academia is both significant and distressing—not least to those of us who earned our degrees in history. As we have witnessed the rewriting of the past to suit the politics of the present, it is little wonder that there has been a decline in the number of those who want to study this most important of subjects. "Go woke, go broke" is a motto that affects history departments as much as any other academic subject.

Secondly, does the dominant secular culture deny any ultimate story (p. 33)? That is true of pure post-modernism, but we are now post-post-modernist. The problem is not that we are just one story in the post-modern marketplace of ideas, it is that those who are the High Priests of our society have pronounced their secular doctrines as absolutes—which we must not blaspheme against. The sexuality story is absolute. The progressive story is absolute. Queer theory is absolute. Critical race theory is about as absolute as you can get.

Thirdly, is it really the case that the "move away from historic denominations to non-denominational churches and the move away from organised religion to the 'nones' both represent a rejection of history and historical communities" (p. 17)? What if the issue is rather that it is the denominations who have moved? What if they are the ones who have rejected real history? Most of the traditional denominations, especially those with a privileged status in society and the media, have tended to move with the currents of the times. They are the ones who are rejecting the history and practice of their tradition and have ended up becoming just the spiritual arm of the progressives.

Finally, a small quibble. Although in modern usage, "puritanical" has now come to mean "having or displaying an overly strict or censorious moral attitude" (which is how it is used on p. 15), I prefer the historical use of the word. In real history, I find the Puritans to be deeply joyful and much more tolerant than many of their peers.

In terms of the sense that Irving-Stonebraker intends for her book's title—that we have a duty to tend and keep historical tradition, being faithful stewards of the past—*Priests of History* is an excellent title. My worry, however, is that the substance of the book attempts to do too much and, as a result, risks ending up as more of a personal testimony and encouragement to engage with history than a textbook for history, theology, ecclesiology, and devotion.

Having said that, as a defense of the importance of history, *Priests of History* is brilliant. As an analysis of contemporary society, it is more than useful. As a pointer to the direction in which the church should be heading, it is interesting and thought-provoking. While I am still wrestling with some of the ideas, I am grateful to Dr Irving-Stonebraker for being such a stimulating author. Which is why I have bought a second copy! Go and get yours.

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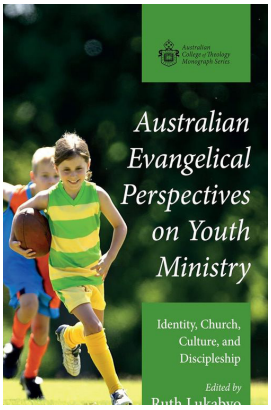
Ruth Lukabyo, ed. *Australian Evangelical Perspectives on Youth Ministry: Identity, Church, Culture, and Discipleship*. Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2023. 276 pp. £29.99/$36.00.



Australian Evangelical Perspectives on Youth Ministry offers an outstanding collection of essays that advance the theological and pastoral conversation regarding ministry to children and young people. Edited by Dr Ruth Lukabyo, who, along with most of the authors, is rooted in Sydney Anglicanism, the book aims to "stimulate readers to think more deeply about discipleship and the principles and assumptions that drive us, based on the rich treasures of God's word" (p. xi).

This is the key contribution of the book. In a field often obsessed with praxis, this book addresses the theological, pastoral, and social foundations of ministry. It both sets the challenge and guides us in the task of seeking "clarity in our theology, working from first principles to refine and revise our ministry practices accordingly" (p. 64).

Before proceeding, it is important to address the title, which may unintentionally limit the readership of this book. The essays are not confined to youth ministry; at least three chapters specifically address ministry to children. Additionally, the Australian perspective does not imply that the book is relevant only for ministry in Australia. Instead, the Australian Evangelical approach to theology and ecclesiology informs each author's work. Lukabyo describes this approach as "Reformed theology, biblicism, congregationalism, a commitment to evangelism, and a rigorous pragmatism" (p. xi).

Like some edited collections, the chapters may initially seem to lack a cohesive throughline. However, the arrangement into four areas wisely preserves the broad priority of theological analysis before reflecting on ministry practice. This does not mean the early chapters lack ministry insights or that the latter chapters are devoid of theology. One of the strengths of each contribution is the natural synthesis of theology and practice at every step.

"Part 1: Identity" (chs. 1–2) combines a socio-cultural analysis of the stories we use to understand young people today with a comprehensive theological treatment of human identity based on Paul's letter to the Romans. In these chapters, Graham Stanton and Lionel Windsor encourage us to view children in the church through the Bible's teaching on human identity set within God's story of redemption.

"Part 2: Church" (chs. 3–6) was, for me, the heart of the book, as it encourages us to examine assumptions about what church is and what church is for. This section is underpinned by the Knox-Robinson schema of ecclesiology, which argues that church is the gathering of God's people to hear God's word rather than a more general term for God's people in the world (p. 64). In chapter 4, Chase Kuhn convincingly demonstrates the biblical grounds for viewing church this way and explains the implications for discipleship in contexts that tend to be dominated by age-specific ministries. In chapter 3, Timothy Paul Jones offers a re-balance to his earlier definition of family ministry, which emphasised family as church and exhorted parents to fulfil their responsibility to disciple their children (p. 41). Here, he envisions the other side of the coin, where intergenerational connections, like those described in Titus and Ephesians, are intentionally fostered to reflect church as family, which in turn creates a powerful witness to a society characterized by segmentation (p. 60). In chapter 5, Tim Beliharz utilizes the sociology of "third place" to explain the significance of the environment of church community in faith development. Finally, in chapter 6, Mike Dicker uses the Anglican formularies to demonstrate the

historic precedence in Anglicanism for children to be considered "full participants" or "full members" of the church (pp. 119–20). Much writing on children and youth ministry neglects the theological rationale for gathering; this blind spot is significantly addressed by these chapters.

"Part 3: Culture" (chs. 7–9) incisively articulates aspects of the context in which our ministry takes places and offers robust biblical correction to these influences. The section begins with a historical-social review of Sunday Schools in colonial Australia. Ruth Lukabyo's chapter ("The Success of Colonial Sunday Schools and Their Ongoing Usefulness Today") acknowledges problematic aspects with this approach but maintains Sunday Schools were not intended to silo churched children from adults (p. 143). They served a social need now met by schools, but through studying their history we are encouraged to reflect on the nexus of family, church, and school in the faith formation of children (p. 143). Andrew Errington's essay ("The Joyful Task of Being Free") exposes the hidden restrictions in applying the modern axiom that people ought to be free unless their actions threaten harm to others (p. 148). He highlights the Christian vision of freedom located solely in Jesus as not only countercultural but also "welcome" for young people who are often aware of the dangers of their own desires (p. 162). The final essay in this section, by Danielle Treweek ("The Place of Singleness in Christian Theology and Culture"), focuses on God's purposes for singleness, an area of Christian culture that has historically conceded too much ground to secular thinking (p. 175). Given that children and youth are "single," it is vital that their understanding of their purpose—their place in God's community, relationships, and marriage—is not shaped by the secular story of singleness and romance but the biblical story. Treweek's chapter faithfully and wisely lays out this story.

"Part 4: Discipleship" (chs. 10–13) begins with Vivian Cheung's chapter ("Paul and the Gift"), which summarizes and offers critical reflections on John Barclay's recent work on "gift" in Paul's writings and explores its "Implications for Youth Ministry Practice" (p. 194). Her purpose is to sharpen the way we communicate God's incongruous grace and model this in countercultural Christian communities. This is followed by Bill Salier's essay ("Faithful Teaching About Sin in the Light of Child Development"), which encourages us to buck the trend of the therapeutic culture and address the biblical doctrine of sin (p. 205). To this end, Salier draws on both developmental psychology and theology to inform how to teach concepts of sin in age-appropriate and theologically faithful ways to children and young people. The final two essays by Timothy Escott ("The Path to Wisdom") and Andrew Spalding ("Nothing New Under the Sun") provide theological and pastoral principles for discipleship derived from the "tender strength" of the Ancient Wisdom found in Proverbs and Ecclesiastes (p. 244). On the basis of the remarkable resonance between Qoholeth's quest and navigating life in the post-modern age (p. 247), Spalding proposes a model of discipleship that transcends the generational and social trends that dominate youth ministry today.

There are many strengths to this collection of essays. The first is the enormous breadth of themes tackled and the depth in which they are considered. Anthropology, sin, ecclesiology, church history, singleness, developmental psychology, sociology, ethics, discipleship, and wisdom are all examined to further ministry to children and young people. A second methodological strength is the sustained engagement with other scholarly literature. The thirteen authors bring us into conversation with a diverse range of dozens of Christian thinkers from the Reformers to contemporary theologians. This approach helps to ensure the application of the book is not constrained to a particular time or cultural context and sets up the reader with next steps for deeper engagement with topics that sit beyond the scope of this book.

Another strength is the book's focus on principles rather than advocating a specific model of ministry. Echoing comments on Ecclesiastes, the book teaches us "how to think, not what to think" (p. 263). This focus on foundational thinking enables the content to be more widely applicable. The "application of theology in each context is difficult work" (p. 83) and, perhaps not surprisingly, at times I felt some chapters could have gone further in exploring practical implications. Yet these are the very areas I need to think through in my own context.

I have served in both children's and youth ministry and also in school chaplaincy for the past 25 years, and at each stage, I have required different resources to develop my skills and thinking. I have benefited from books on curriculum and presenting talks, ministry structures and programs, leadership, and pastoral care. This collection provides something unique. It engages with a multiplicity of disciplines while rigorously adhering to the primacy of Scripture to set the standard for theologically driven ministry practice. The scholarly nature of each essay and the focus on theology and ministry foundations tilt the book towards ministry leaders. However, all who long for children and youth to grow as mature disciples of Jesus will benefit from reading these contributions, either selectively or as a whole collection.

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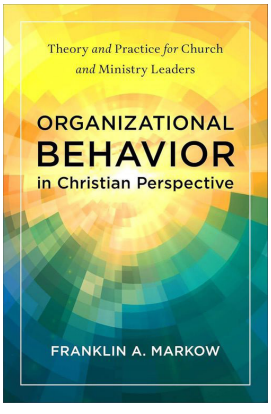
Franklin A. Markow. *Organizational Behavior in Christian Perspective: Theory and Practice for Church and Ministry Leaders*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2024. 243 pp. £22.99/$27.99.



Those with seminary degrees in pastoral ministry can often feel equipped to preach God's word, care for the hurting, and protect the church from false teaching but feel ill-equipped to lead the church as an organization. Franklin Markow's *Organizational Behavior in Christian Perspective* is an attempt to help church leaders lead their churches better via insights gleaned from the discipline, well-known in the business world, of organizational behavior. He defines organizational behavior as "the study of people in organizations—how they relate to one another in an organizational context, how they relate to the organization itself, and how the organization relates to its people" (p. 4). This means that Markow's work does not look at the "hard side" of management (finance, policy, HR, legal compliance) but the "soft side" of management (effectively leading and managing people).

With the intended goal of introducing organizational behavior to church leaders, Markow supplies a fivefold schema for understanding the different levels of organizational life. These levels are the Individual, Interpersonal Relationships, Groups, Organizational Culture, and Interorganizational Connection. Each level explains how individuals relate to organizations, how these individuals relate to one another in that organization, and how this all cultivates an organizational culture. Markow's work is comprehensive but short enough for busy pastors to read. He defines and explains each level and offers tips on how to manage each level properly. Helpfully, most of Markow's illustrations are situated in the church setting, with a case study presented at the end of each chapter.

Markow's work offers practical insight into the nexus between organizational thinking and the life of the local church. This is illustrated by his discussions in three areas: the organizational nature of the church, interpersonal relationships, and group dynamics.

First, Markow argues that when a local church gathers there an organization gathers as well. Too often church leaders ignore this reality and, in their language, narrow the church down to a single metaphor—e.g., "The church is not an organization; it is an organism" or "Our church is really a family." Markow contends that if church leaders only view the church through one lens, they overlook the richness and importance of other dimensions of church life (notably, the organizational).

Further, Markow makes the point that the church is indeed a "spiritual reality" created by God and empowered by the Holy Spirit but at the same time is "a very human entity." He states, "While we have a clear understanding and theology of the divine nature of the church—well-reasoned ecclesiologies, polities, and qualifications for eldership—it is my contention that we have a very underdeveloped understanding of the human nature of the church" (p. 12). This, he argues, is a consequence of the New Testament's silence regarding the details of church organization and form. Markow is not claiming, however, that the New Testament is completely silent on these matters, simply that it is "largely" silent on them. In light of this, Markow's work is an attempt to further develop our practical theology of the church by using the tool of organizational behavior and in a way that can be applied to episcopal, presbyterian, or congregational forms of polity.

As such, Markow's argument will work well for those who are comfortable seeing the church as both an organism and an organization. However, readers who need some additional convincing that the church should be understood in these terms will have to look elsewhere in order to substantiate his claims (for example, Colin Marshall and Tony Payne, *The Trellis and the Vine: The Ministry Mind-Shift that Changes Everything*, 3rd ed. [Sydney: Matthias Media, 2024] or Andrew Heard, *Growth and Change: The Danger and Necessity of a Passion for Church Growth* [Sydney: Matthias Media, 2024]).

Second, *Organizational Behavior* offers illuminating explanations of common issues often found within the church. Markow's chapter on interpersonal relationships helpfully illustrates this point. He begins with the observation that "ministry is a people-focused endeavor, and our personal relationships can determine our effectiveness or lack thereof" (p. 84). Markow then works through the issues of trust, safety, work family (explained below), and work friendships. In regard to safety he writes, "When people do not feel safe, they are less likely to share their opinions, make valuable contributions, and allow others to see who they truly are" (p. 91). This lack of safety can lead to feelings of isolation and loneliness. Markow then suggests that church leaders should embrace the responsibility of leading in this area and work to reduce people's fear of open conversations. Ultimately, good leaders will want to achieve "challenger safety," where people feel safe to speak up and challenge conventional wisdom when they think there is an opportunity to improve.

Third, it is easy to see how interpersonal relationships naturally overflow into the group level. Seeing the church as a work family also suggests that emotions are shared among people in the same system. For example, "If one member is feeling stressed, others in the system will feel stress in one way or another" (p. 95). Often if there are weak interpersonal relationships when a tension arises people will attempt to distance themselves from the tension, engage head on with the conflict, give up on doing their job, or attempt to do someone else's job, or even triangulate (bringing in a third party to address the issue). In contrast, Markow suggests that leaders take steps to develop positivity in the workplace

(before adopting a challenger mentality), consistently spend time with people week-in and week-out, and model vulnerability with others.

This bleeds over into a key distinction between groups and teams. All teams are groups, but not all groups are teams. In short, "a team is a group but one with much more autonomy and shared responsibility" (p. 111). This is important for church leaders because "a small group or ministry that starts off with gusto and achieves its goals may, in time, deteriorate into nothing more than a social group" (p. 121). Often, this leads to a phenomenon known as "groupthink." Groupthink occurs when excessive homogeneity (same background, age, experience) has created an echo chamber, leaving the group closed off to other perspectives. Further, these groups in the church will often engage in an "escalation of commitment" (sometimes investing additional resources into failing causes). As a result, such groups are prone to "collectively stick to their guns, so to speak, to prove they are right" (p. 122). Managing some of the more problematic dynamics of groups can be alleviated if leaders regularly change membership of their groups, are intentional about bringing in diverse points of view, give members permission to dissent, and appoint a "devil's advocate" to lovingly challenge the group's presuppositions. Leaders can manage better when they strive to coach teams instead.

Organizational Behavior is not only a helpful book for pastors and church leaders; in my view, it is essential reading for all who wish to shepherd God's church with wisdom. While the book can occasionally be overwhelming, each chapter is filled with practical insights on organizational leadership that will certainly aid in pastoral leadership. Pastors, I can think of no better way of commending this book than saying that your congregation will thank you for reading it.

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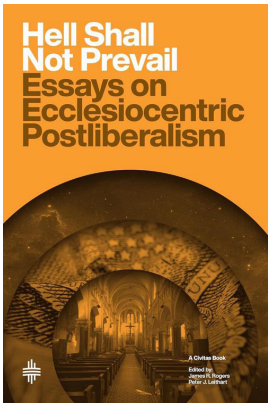
James R. Rogers and Peter J. Leithart, eds. *Hell Shall Not Prevail: Essays on Ecclesiocentric Postliberalism.* Monroe, LA: Athanasius, 2024. 163 pp. £6.99/$16.95.



Patrick Deneen's *Why Liberalism Failed* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018) garnered praise from a wide spectrum of voices: from Barack Obama and David Brooks to Allan Carlson and D. G. Hart. Although there seems to be a widespread sentiment that political liberalism has indeed failed, there is no clear consensus on what should take its place. Part of the problem is a lack of clear definitions.

The burden of *Hell Shall Not Prevail*, a volume of essays edited by James Rogers and Peter Leithart, is to bring the resources of a robust doctrine of the church into the question of what comes "after" liberalism. It is the fruit of the Civitas Group, a "research colloquium sponsored by the Theopolis Institute" (p. x). For the Civitas Group, "ecclesiocentric postliberalism" flows out of core theological commitments: "As a political message, the gospel offers salvation to peoples as well as to individuals. Social salvation, like individual salvation, is the gift of King Jesus" (p. x). The contributors come from a wide variety of backgrounds: theologians, pastors, professors of political science and philosophy, and lawyers. This adds both depth and breadth to the volume.

Leithart's initial essay, "Liberalism Is Heretical Ecclesiology," critiques foundational liberal thinkers from an ecclesiological view. He argues that both Hobbes and Locke had a deficient view of the church, and so the foundations of liberalism are theologically weak at their core. But why should we care what Hobbes and Locke thought about the church? Is not the point of liberalism the creation of a public square free from any churchly influence? Does not bringing the church into discussions of politics lead to "Christian nationalism"? Not necessarily.

Dave Reiter ("Can Liberalism Provide an Adequate Secular Justification for Respect of Persons?") takes on some of the most influential liberal accounts of personal worth—notably, Immanuel Kant, John Stuart Mill, and John Rawls—and demonstrates that none of these thinkers can ultimately provide a cogent case for valuing human persons. This, then, proves to be a major Achilles' heel in the liberal project. If we have no reason to value people or their opinions, then what is the point of liberalism? Here, the radical woke critics seem to be more consistent when they argue that we should curtail "free speech" when it opposes the current orthodoxy regarding minorities and oppression. In contrast, Reiter offers a theological account of human worth, rooted in the *imago Dei* and in the doctrine of the church.

Gary Young is both a lawyer and a professor, and so his chapter ("The Church Builds the World") provides a unique perspective. Drawing on legal theorist Robert Cover's analysis of how religious communities build unique political and social orders, he applies this framework of "world-maintaining forces" and "world-building forces" to how the church can become a world-building force in an increasingly fragmented world. Young articulates some of the central features of the "ecclesiocentric" postliberal position. Fundamentally, "Ecclesiocentrism is the claim that after the ascension of Christ and the announcement of the Great Commission, the church was placed at the center of the world, just as the temple had been the center of the world in the prior order (Ezek 5:5)" (p. 66). But what does this focus on the church look like, practically? How does this vision translate into the nitty-gritty of politics and policy? Young, along with most of the authors in this volume, does not provide these specifics. The ecclesiocentric vision is just that—a vision. This volume does not pretend to flesh out all the details. That is the work of the readers, assuming they are part of Christ's church.

This highlights a key point of the book:

> In this way, the church stands in the center of the world, presenting a divinely constituted World [the church] to the world: In both the teachings and practices of the church, it portrays the divinely designed signs of the fundamental issues of political and social life. The gospel, through both Word and sacrament conveyed in the church, transforms its members. So too, by living out its common practices, the gospel transforms our imaginations: We are able to convey possibilities in the world that otherwise cannot conceive of them. As we live out those possibilities, the world outside the World is transformed as well (cf. 1 Cor. 14:14). (p. 67)

In his essay "Liberalism and the Restlessness of the American Soul," Andrew Bobo revisits the work of Alexis de Tocqueville and shows his continuing relevance for our current cultural challenges. De Tocqueville saw that one of the defining features of the American experience was "restlessness." Bobo demonstrates how this basic restlessness lies at the root of many of our contemporary pathologies: distraction, short-sightedness, isolation, and degradation. Bobo's answer to these pathologies is, unsurprisingly, the power of Christ, as mediated through his church. This is not a criticism. After all, the main thrust of the book is how a robust ecclesiology can explain, apply to, and potentially heal, the fragmentation of the modern project.

In addition to penning the introduction, James R. Rogers authored two essays for this volume. His first essay ("Church as *Polis*, Church as *Ethnos*, Church as *Oikos*: Ecclesiocentric Political Theory") should perhaps have been placed earlier in the book, since it presents the main concerns of the "ecclesiocentric" model. In opposition to the majority of Americans, including Christians, who regard civil community and civil jurisdiction to be primary, Rogers argues that the church provides both the telos and the model for all earthly communities. Central to ecclesiocentrism is the claim that "the telos of the nation-state—*ethnos* and *polis*—as well as that of the household (or *oikos*), is found in the church. Or … the worldly *polis* and *ethnos* (and *oikos*) provide, at most, figures of the church and of the solidarity found fully only within the church" (p. 95). Because Christ is the telos of all creation (Col 1:15–20) and because the church is the body of Christ, it is a small step to see Christ/church as the telos of all earthly communities (Rev 21). Ecclesiocentric post-liberalism aims to flesh out the political consequences of taking seriously the centrality of the church for every arena of human action.

Overall, this volume is a welcome addition to the current discourse and debate about how Christians and Christian theology should relate to and think about politics and culture. It avoids many of the simplistic and reductionistic answers currently on offer, such as the "keep religion out of politics" view of many on the left or the "put the Bible and prayer back in public schools" attitude of many on the right. It reminds us, as baptized believers, that our true identity is found in Christ and his body, the church. The authors call all of us to live our lives more consistently with this fundamental reality. If every Christian did that, it would be interesting to see how our political and cultural life might be transformed.

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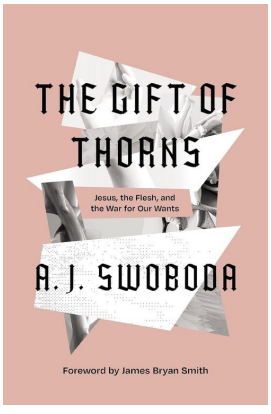
A. J. Swoboda. *The Gift of Thorns: Jesus, the Flesh, and the War for Our Wants*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2024. 256 pp. £20.00/$26.99.



How are we to think about our desires? Are they essentially good or fundamentally fallen? Should we divinize and indulge them or demonize and deny them? To help us wrestle with such questions, A. J. Swoboda, assistant professor of Bible and Theology at Bushnell University, has written *The Gift of Thorns: Jesus, the Flesh, and the War for Our Wants*. The book's subtitle is clarifying, for what Swoboda has produced is both a biblical theology and a pastoral theology of desire. It is, therefore, as much a study in discipleship as it is in dogmatics. Indeed, as James Bryan Smith expresses in the foreword, its purpose is to explore "the essential role of desires in our formation into Christlikeness" (p. xv).

Consistent with this aim, *The Gift of Thorns* is not just theological but also personal—Swoboda often shares painful aspects of his own life and struggles. While laden with exegetical reflections and numerous citations drawn from a wide range of authors, the book also contains numerous anecdotes and illustrations, and many sections have an engaging, sermonic quality to them. In short, this is a skillfully written book that is a delight to read and is rich in IPP—Insights Per Page! This is aided by the fact that Swoboda is the master of the pithy, memorable, and often alliterative sentence. Here is a small sample from the first chapter:

"We cover rather than confess." (p. 6)
"Darkness isn't eradicated through denial." (p. 7)
"We become the stories we tell ourselves about ourselves." (p. 13)
"We aren't lucky. We are loved." (p. 13)
"Humans desire because God desires." (p. 16)
"Human wants are birthed from lack. Divine wants are birthed from love." (p. 20)
"A perversion always implies a purpose." (p. 22)

Before turning to the book's contents, a word about the main title is in order. As part of his exposition of how our created desires have been corrupted by the fall and are now being reordered in Christ, Swoboda draws attention to the biblical theme of thorns, especially its first appearance in Genesis 3:18: "The land will produce thorns and thistles *for* you" (p. xxvi, emphasis original). As thorns "represent a world in which things don't go the way they should," they frustrate and cause pain. However, the reason Swoboda has italicized the word "for" is because he sees "these intentional inconveniences built into our everyday existence not as bugs, but as features—not as problems, but as gifts" (p. xxvi). Thorns are thus key to the reformation of our desires!

The body of the book is comprised of four parts. "Part 1: The War for Our Wants" begins with a chapter on "God's Desire" (ch. 1). This is not simply because Genesis 1 reveals the divine determination to create a cosmos but because Scripture as a whole unfolds "the story of God's desire" (p. 7). Chapter 2 ("Human Desire") makes the point that "humans are creatures of desire simply by virtue of having been made by a Creator of desire. We reflect our Maker" (p. 25). This not only confirms the goodness of created desires but shows why Christianity "isn't a hospice for desire. It's a hospital for desire where it can be healed, restored, and resurrected to its original design" (p. 28). The final chapter in Part 1 is titled "Satan's Desire" (ch. 3). As Scripture demonstrates, the devil often "awakens our desires by insinuating we are missing out" (p. 63). This both spotlights the fact that sin is essentially "the act of seeing and taking something that isn't given by God" (p. 62) as well as pointing ahead to the solution: "there is no such thing as 'missing out' when we are in Christ" (p. 63).

In the opening chapter of "Part 2: The Disordering of Our Desires," Swoboda delves into the dark domain of "Fleshly Desire" (ch. 4). This chapter is full of valuable insights but, puzzlingly, attaches the corruption of human desires to our separation from "God's sustaining presence" (p. 70)—although he later affirms that "we're all born with disordered souls" (p. 87). The chapter also includes the questionable claim (more Catholic than Reformed) that "experiencing the flesh's desires isn't a sin. Following them is" (p. 77). Nonetheless, his exposition of the believer's daily battle with indwelling sin and the relevance of Paul's "thorn in the flesh" are both penetrating and encouraging. Chapter 5 ("Waning Desire") explores "desire loss"—for God, church, prayer, etc. (p. 105)—and the relationship between duty and desire—"the two feet of discipleship" (p. 100). Chapter 6 ("Undesired Desires") grapples with the fact that "not only do we have unwanted desires; we are composed *mostly* of them" (p. 116, emphasis original). How then might these be purified? Later chapters explore this question further, but here Swoboda affirms the Puritan insight that "God makes us holy by giving us what they call the 'strokes' or 'crosses'—not by giving us what we want" (p. 119).

"Part 3: The Nurture of Our Longings" opens with a chapter on "Killing Desire" (ch. 7). Here the author returns to the question of concupiscence, "that pulsating desire in all of us for that which God does not want" (p. 134). He also offers a more balanced account of temptation, noting that while some enticements to sin come from outside of us, often "evil simply needs to affirm desires already resident

within us" (p. 137). Still, the good news for believers is that although progress is painful and the journey lifelong, "choosing to give up one's false loves and letting them rest under a love for God" is something the Spirit makes possible (p. 135). In "Nurturing Desire" (ch. 8), Swoboda continues to explore the reconstruction of our desires. One key insight (of many) in this chapter is that when we fail "to see ourselves as children desired and noticed by the Father, we end up needing others to desire and notice us to feel fulfilled." We then "place an invisible yoke on others to fill our emotional debts" (p. 166). Chapter 9 ("Ordering Desire") is, yet again, brimming with wisdom: e.g., "We are and become what we love" (p. 173); "Idolatry … is a life *given over* to a particular false love" (p. 175, emphasis original); "We tend, by law of nature, to pick up the desires of those around us" (p. 182); and contentment "is not the absence of desire. Rather, it is a desire rightly ordered to that which we are given by God" (p. 177).

The final part of the book ("The Revival of our Passions") begins with a chapter titled "Resurrecting Desire" (ch. 10). Here Swoboda offers a couple of curious lines of arguments, where the conclusions do not clearly follow from the premises: e.g., "Evil is the abuse of the good. This is why Joseph can say to his brothers …, 'You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good' (Gen 50:20)" (p. 200). Nevertheless, his answers to the questions, "How do we wake up our desire?" (p. 205) and "Will we continue to want in heaven?" (p. 208), are thoughtful and stimulating. The theme of desire's fulfilment is brought to a climax in the book's final chapter ("Longing Desire"). Here Swoboda explores the fact that, in God's gracious dealings with us, delayed gratification is often the key to "awakening and maturing our desire" and "also a great revealer of our false gods." Consequently, "Waiting is often treacherous" (p. 220). Our hope, however, is that when the parousia takes place, our "desire will be resurrected" and "will find what it has always sought." And yet, writes Swoboda (echoing Augustine's thought at the end of *The City of God*), it "still won't be satisfied. For the face it has always sought will take endless time to take in" (p. 222).

A few final reflections. *The Gift of Thorns* is a book worth reading more than once. Even though some of the author's observations and conclusion may be debatable, it will make you think and make you pray. While not all readers will enjoy Swoboda's prose as much as I did, and some may wish for structural indicators (e.g., subheadings) to elucidate the shape and development of each chapter's argument, my encouragement is to allow him to take you on the journey he has mapped out and, along the way, to ponder the many interesting landmarks he points out. For when it comes to the redemption of our desires, thorns really are a gift and, without doubt, "the one who bore those thorns is God's greatest gift" (p. 224).

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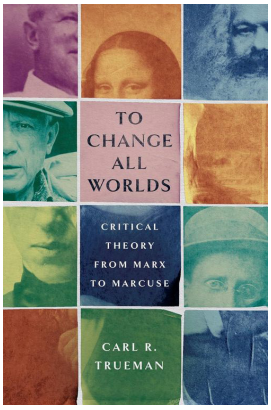
Carl R. Trueman. *To Change All Worlds: Critical Theory from Marx to Marcuse*. Brentwood, TN: B&H Academic, 2024. 256 pp. £30.50/$34.99.



Many Christian intellectuals today are more than happy to speak of the continuing influence of the Christian religion in our so-called "secular age." And yet some of the same leaders can become very skittish about the suggestion that Marxism could be a powerfully operating ideology as well. Cultural Christianity in our "secular" age? Of course! But Cultural Marxism in a capitalist liberal democracy? Don't be a reactionary culture warrior! Fortunately, a number of scholars are now pointing out Marxism's abiding influence, especially in the form of "Great Awokening." (See, for example, Neil Shenvi and Pat Sawyer, *Critical Dilemma: The Rise of Critical Theories and Social Justice Ideology—Implications for the Church and Society* [Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 2023].) Indeed, Marxism's genius, like Christianity's, is its ability to adapt to changing times.

In light of all this, Carl Trueman's latest book offers an important contribution to our understanding of where this Great Awokening has come from, historically and intellectually. *To Change All Worlds* is Trueman's account of an intellectual movement—the Frankfurt School—that evolved into critical theory, postmodernism, and so much that is today labeled "woke." Most of the early Frankfurt School theorists were middle-class Jews trying to come to grips with the failure of the working class to overthrow capitalism, as well as the rise of anti-Semitism and fascism, both of which proved more appealing than Marxism to the working classes, particularly in Germany.

The focus of Trueman's study is critical theory, a form of social analysis that seeks to prove that society is merely a theatre of oppression in order to inspire a movement to overthrow society in its current form. As Trueman writes, "Critical theory does not seek to critique the contemporary system with a view to improving it. It seeks to critique the contemporary system with a view to overthrowing it entirely" (p. 100). (Recall that the motto of Black Lives Matter is not "Reform the police" but "Defund the police.") In all, Trueman does a masterful job of showing how classical Marxism, married with Freudianism and some early-twentieth-century sociology, morphed into the critical theory that would help spawn the Sexual Revolution and the modern critical race theory that inspires Black Lives Matter.

I will now highlight three of the theorists Trueman discusses. First, while never himself a member of the Frankfurt School, the Hungarian Marxist philosopher, Georg Lukacs, profoundly influenced its development and made several contributions to what would become critical theory. Trueman offers a clear and illuminating discussion of his thought, showing how it leads to conclusions at work in the radical left today. For example, Trueman calls Lukacs's concept of "reification" (literally "thing-ification") "arguably one of the most important [concepts] for critical theory, perhaps even its central concern" (p. 74). According to Lukacs's idea of reification, people have a propensity to describe complex social relations and behaviors—our economic relations and transactions, for example—as though they are things or realities that exist apart from and independently of humans, and which we enter and participate in, and whose laws we are subject to. The economy, for example, is nothing but an umbrella term for how humans behave towards one another as far as buying, selling, trading, and lending goes. And yet we talk about the laws of the economy as though they are a reality apart from and beyond

human behavior. For Lukacs, however, the economy is not some thing or entity existing independently of our actions; rather, it *is* our actions, it *is* our social relations.

Understanding that the economy is nothing other than a reification of our behavior is the first step to changing our behavior and liberating ourselves from a particular mode of it—capitalistic behavior. It is not hard to see how this idea of Lukacs might evolve and, during the Sexual Revolution, be applied not so much to economic relations but to sexual relations between men and women. Enter Simone de Beauvoir and second-wave feminism and, later, Judith Butler and queer theory, and being a woman or a man is merely a performance that can just as easily be put off as it is put on.

Second, Max Horkheimer was "the most distinguished and influential director" of the Institute for Social Research, the home of the Frankfurt School (pp. 80–81). As well as continuing the analysis of reification, Horkheimer developed Marx's teachings on alienation and false consciousness. Alienation is the malady that plagues people in capitalist societies. They feel alienated from their work because it is exploitative and meaningless, they feel alienated from fellow workers with whom they are often in competition, they certainly feel alienated from their employers, and one might add that they feel alienated from their families because of the nature of modern work.

So why do the workers not rise up and overthrow the system? Simply because they either do not know they are being exploited or, if they do, they do not know exactly how and why. Perhaps they have bought into reifications like "work" or "national economy," reifications that make them think these are natural orders within which they must live and whose laws are binding and necessary. Perhaps they are enthralled by nationalism or religion or popular entertainment, and these things convince them that their exploitation is either justified or bearable. Whatever the reason, these are forms of "false consciousness," and the job of the critical theorist is to shake the workers out of it and rouse them to revolution. Horkheimer also gave serious consideration to the problems created by technology, which has always been seen as something of a savior for humans, liberating us from drudgery. But, at least in the modern world, it has become a new overlord, enslaving us to itself. Trueman offers modern examples of the problem Horkheimer identifies. For example, do we spend less time on daily correspondence since the introduction of email, or more time?

Third, Herbert Marcuse, the most famous of the first generation of critical theorists, spent a good deal of his life teaching in California. Marcuse accepted the notions of reification, alienation, and false consciousness but, drawing on the work of Wilhelm Reich, added a Freudian twist and argued that capitalism does not merely oppress us economically but also represses us sexually. For Marcuse and Reich, then, an economic revolution would also lead to a sexual revolution. But at the same time, both theorists were happy to see a sexual revolution unfolding without the economic revolution. In other words, our received notions of what it is to be a man or a woman, what proper sexual expression is, and how men and women should relate to the social sphere in general, were all forms of false consciousness—exploitative reifications whose function was to maintain an exploitative economic order. Thus, to be liberated meant to cast off traditional sexual morality and embrace a kind of sexual anarchy. Or to be pithy, *all* consensual sex is fine. Michel Foucault would develop this idea to a greater degree and become the most influential intellectual behind the formation of queer theory, the offshoot of critical theory that seeks to "disrupt" and "destabilize" all sexual "givens." In other words, the modern LGBTQ movement is largely a continuation of the critical theory of the likes of Reich and Marcuse.

Marcuse was also a passionate critic of freedom of speech, which he thought had as much potential to be oppressive as it did to be liberating. In his famous 1965 essay "Repressive Tolerance," Marcuse

argued that freedom of speech and association, indeed, freedom in general, should not be extended to conservative social movements, for this would be like feeding the snake that would eventually devour its owner. As Trueman points out, Marcuse had the rise of Nazism in mind and Hitler's open promise that he would use democracy to smash democracy—which he did. But as Trueman points out, this aspect of Marcuse's thought is still very influential on university campuses:

> Hence, the pressure that freedom of speech is under on college campuses and in wider Western society makes sense: once one assumes that culture is [oppressive] ideology, false consciousness or, to use contemporary language, a discourse of power designed to empower some at the cost of excluding others, then the terms by which it asserts its virtues become the tools by which it actually exercises its vices. (p. 106)

In other words, free speech, like private property rights according to Marxism, is truly just a covert way to oppress racial and sexual minorities and, like property rights, needs to be either abolished or greatly revised for the sake of liberation, hence the cancel culture and deplatforming that now takes place in many universities.

As per Trueman's style, he tries to be charitable where he can and is at pains to make the reader understand why critical theory arose in the first place and what genuine social maladies it was often responding to—e.g., Nazism, fascism, war, and an ethic of consumption. He also points out that umbrella terms or reifications are absolutely necessary for coming to grips with and talking about the world. The key is not to avoid them but first to see people as God's image bearers and then to analyze society through a biblical lens.

There are many more riches to be gleaned from Trueman's book, but the best way to find them is to buy it and read it. What Trueman offers is a clear outline and valuable Christian appraisal of critical theory. But ultimately, he is not optimistic about searching out the critical theorists for insights. His concern, which I share, is that not all meats are worth chewing on, even if one intends only "to eat the meat and leave the bones" (p. 109). Not that Trueman says no one should ever read the critical theorists, but he suggests that probably more harm than good will come from a *general* encouragement to do so. Given the pernicious impact that much critical theory is having on evangelical churches, I have no doubt he is being wise here. (On this point, see also Voddie T. Baucham, *Fault Lines: The Social Justice Movement and Evangelicalism's Looming Catastrophe* [Washington, DC: Salem Books, 2021].) In short, some meats are so full of bones they are better avoided. For most of us, Trueman's summary and evaluation will be more than sufficient.

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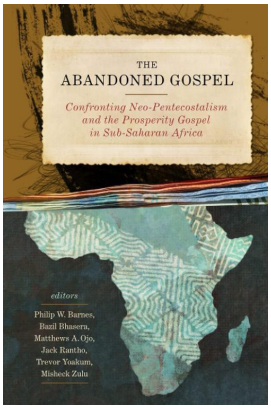
— MISSION AND CULTURE —

Philip W. Barnes, Brazil Bhasera, Matthews A. Ojo, Jack Rantho, Trevor Yoakum, and Misheck Zulu, eds. *The Abandoned Gospel: Confronting Neo-Pentecostalism and the Prosperity Gospel in Sub-Saharan Africa.* Africa: AB316, 2021. 291 pp. £9.43/$11.99.



The Abandoned Gospel helpfully alerts evangelicals worldwide about invasive theologies spreading around sub-Saharan Africa and the globe. The authors, composed of roughly twenty pastors, professors, and missionaries who have worked extensively in African contexts, provide a clear understanding of the detrimental impact of the prosperity gospel and neo-Pentecostal movements. Furthermore, they offer biblical responses to these ideologies to strengthen the African church, contend for the faith, and protect the bride of Christ (p. 2).

The book has three primary sections. First, the authors use chapters 1–3 to trace the history and development of Africa's prosperity and neo-Pentecostal movements. Second, chapters 4–9 outline biblical responses to specific theological concepts of the movements. Third, chapters 10–24 focus on how church planting and development strategies should respond biblically to these influences.

In part 1, the authors trace the development of Christianity within Africa, answering how these two movements gained traction. Christianity began to grow in Africa due to the Great Awakening in Europe and America, the abolition of the slave trade, and increased missionary efforts. As Christianity spread in the nineteenth century, charismatic and neo-Pentecostal leaders naturally arose and increased, aided by developments in technology, communication, and transportation.

A strength of the book is the authors' insider perspectives that exegete their own cultures insightfully and accurately. Nearly every author in the book articulates the unique cultural situation in African culture that has allowed a syncretistic approach between Christianity and African Traditional Religion (ATR). For example, the authors describe the transition from the ATR's use of witch doctors to cast out evil spirits that cause infirmities to the powerful "Man of God" in the Neo-Pentecostal and prosperity gospel movements (p. 76). This fundamental understanding of ATR and African culture allows the authors to see where syncretism develops and provide biblical responses.

A further strength is the authors' rootedness in Scripture. Specifically, the authors understand that Neo-Pentecostalism and the prosperity "gospel" are indeed not the gospel (p. 47). Instead of preaching the message of Scripture to repent and have faith in Christ, these movements proclaim a message of deliverance from evil.

Part 2 of the book provides specific examples of the practices of these two movements and the biblical response to them. The authors outline key issues of these two movements, such as healings and deliverance, speaking in tongues, dreams, and prophecy, to provide biblical insight into how these practices are misused in the movement and to establish biblical boundaries.

Part 3 of the book provides examples and principles for how a local church can combat these movements through faithful teaching and ministry practices. The authors seek to keep the true gospel first in the church's teaching ministries through a Christocentric hermeneutic emphasizing sin and Christ as Scripture presents him. Part 3 of this book will likely be a valuable tool for discipling young men aspiring to pastoral ministry in Africa and believers transitioning from the prosperity gospel to

healthy theological convictions. The authors remind believers to stay faithful to the truth of Scripture while not losing themselves to the cultural syncretism in the movements spreading through Africa.

A collection with multiple authors means varying writing styles, repetitive information, and an occasional sense of disconnected chapters. On the other hand, the range of authors provides strength, as the reader is reminded, from varying voices across a healthy theological spectrum, that the neo-Pentecostal and prosperity gospel movements in Africa are not true gospels at all.

Chapter 11 concludes in such a way that it would serve well as the conclusion to the whole book. Rev. Musonda writes, "Though [leaders of these two movements] use the name of Jesus and quote passages of Scripture to justify their practices, their ministries are intended for self-glorification and therefore are devoid of the saving power of the gospel" (p. 139). *The Abandoned Gospel* accomplishes its task and reminds readers, "The reformation of the church in Africa is not only an urgent task, it is a feasible one because it is in the purpose of God" (p. 291). While this book addresses concerns in Africa, the worldwide church would be wise to heed the voices of these brothers as they "contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints" (Jude 3).

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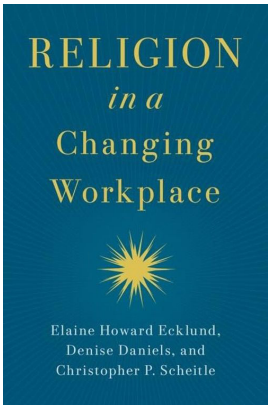
Elaine H. Ecklund, Denise Daniels, and Christopher P. Scheitle. *Religion in a Changing Workplace*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2024. 201 pp. £16.99/$24.95.



The authors of *Religion in a Changing Workplace* began their research in 2018 and practically stated, "Our years of research on this topic led us to conclude that shutting out religion from the workplace is not only impractical, if not impossible, but also not the best way forward" (p. 148). Ecklund, Daniels, and Scheitle are social scientists who write about a "new way of looking at religion in the US workplace … considering not only how individual but also group characteristics and differences have an impact on expression of faith in the workplace" (p. 2). Their book aims to "foster healthy workplaces, healthy workers, and healthy religious tolerance and pluralism" (p. 2). In effect, they advocate for religion to be part of the workplace Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) conversation. Given the admirable scope of this book, which includes all faiths—including the non-religious—it is relevant for both secular and faith-based audiences. While Christians are likely to find their perspective(s) expressed in this work and will be interested in reading about the experiences of other faiths, the book is relevant to all leaders interested in why and how to include religion in the workplace.

Across ten chapters, the authors contend that "faith can be expressed at work in ways that benefit both employees and organizations" (p. 7); explore "how workers use faith to find meaning, purpose, and calling in their work" (p. 7); spotlight experiences with discrimination; and lay out strategies organizations can employ "to support religious expression while protecting and honoring the identities of both religious and non-religious workers" (p. 8). Each chapter (except the first) ends with "The Bottom Line"—a beneficial summary reinforcing key ideas. Scholars will appreciate the breadth and depth of

familiar references from Marx (p. 72) to Wuthnow (p. 57) to Keller (p. 31), while likely encountering new sources as well.

The book consists of findings from a primary survey conducted in 2018, supplemented by another survey in 2021, investigating the impact of the pandemic on relationships at work. Both surveys yielded over 15,000 responses and 300 follow-up interviews. Since Christianity remains the most dominant religion in the United States (p. 4), most interviews were conducted with Christians, but Muslims, Jews, and non-religious adherents were also included. These interviews aimed to be "a representative distribution of gender and race and ethnicity" (p. 156).

One unique contribution was the introduction of four approaches (conceptualized as quadrants) related to how work is experienced as a calling based on the type of purpose (intrinsic or extrinsic) and location of the audience the work serves (proximal or distal) (pp. 43–49). At the individual level, this conceptualization allows the reader to reflect on and self-assess their own experience(s) of finding meaning in their work because the quadrants are not mutually exclusive. Taking a broader approach, churches and small groups could consider forums to discuss self-assessments, in addition to reading this volume for overall context—not just for their specific faith, but to understand the experience(s) of those of other faiths.

As a Christian who has worked in for-profit organizations in Canada for over twenty-five years with teammates across the United States (and globally), I found the guidance the authors provided to workplace leaders (pp. 109–11) to be relevant and practical—such as making religious discrimination reporting procedures clear. On the other hand, their advice is not necessarily equally applicable to all sizes of organizations, because asking employees in large corporations what celebrations they want to see may not be feasible.

The book concludes with additional recommendations for organizational leaders to navigate "potential downsides" related to religion at work (pp. 149–52), which are also relevant for individuals and faith communities. Each recommendation challenges organizations to reconsider the role of religion in the workplace, and I cannot help but wonder if rethinking the role of religion is not the clarion call for workplace inclusion. This book certainly makes that case.

Overall, I wanted to see more discussion around the impact of workplace dynamics between co-workers, teams, managers, and workplace culture on the experience of expressing faith at work. Perhaps this discussion would also have surfaced more examples of participant experiences related to discrimination due to the "salience of a person's religious identity" (pp. 98–99) and other factors like gender, race, age, and education level (pp. 99–100). I also wanted more inspiration. Verbatims such as Ben's (p. 47) were a bonus in this volume because they reinforced the authors' points and inspired the reader to find ways to do likewise. Interestingly, even those verbatims that were not uplifting encouraged me (and I hope other readers) to consider my own experiences at work and what action(s) I can take.

In short, this book complements volumes like Timothy Keller's *Every Good Endeavor* (New York: Penguin, 2012). It contributes meaningfully to the "faith-friendly" tenet central to the faith at work movement as popularized by David Miller's volume, *God at Work: The History and Promise of the Faith at Work Movement* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007). It also extends the conversation to challenge DEI efforts in practical, actionable ways that readers can promote within their organizations.

While it may be quixotic to expect religion to be part of the workplace DEI conversation, it is perhaps even more unrealistic to exclude religion from the workplace altogether.

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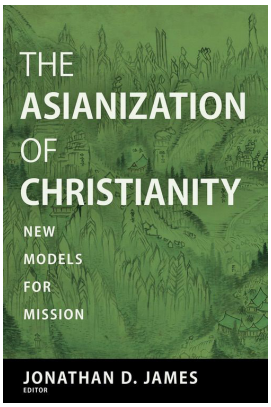
Jonathan D. James, ed. *The Asianization of Christianity: New Models for Mission*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2024. xiv + 355 pp. £27.07/$47.00.



The essays and case studies that make up *The Asianization of Christianity: New Models for Mission* collectively present a convincing argument for contextualizing the gospel by providing examples of biblically faithful contextualization in diverse Asian fields. As a long-time missionary who has served in East and Southeast Asia, I often look back on my first years in the field and cringe at the mistakes stemming from an inability to listen and study the host culture I was serving. Many years later, while I better understand the importance of contextualization in ministry, I often struggle with how to do it well in my particular context in Asia. The practical, biblical examples in James's book are a welcome contrast and complement to current literature on contextualization, which tends to focus on theory or forsake doctrinal fidelity for cultural relevance.

James introduces the book by defining the term "Asianization" and explaining why Asianization is necessary for reaching the pluriform cultures of Asia. It is here that James makes his argument that Asianization is a form of "intercultural engagement," over and against "cultural negation" and "cultural appropriation," that is needed if the gospel is to be understood in Asian contexts (pp. 6–7).

The book proceeds to argue for Asianization in three sections, each comprised of essays and case studies written by experts in their specific fields of ministry. Section 1, "Core Issues," offers a four-chapter overview of important themes to help the reader understand the case studies that follow. This gives the reader a brief introduction to the missiological conversation around contextualization (ch. 1), a historical overview of contextualization in Asia (ch. 2), communication theory (ch. 3), and collectivism (ch. 4).

Section 2, "Mission and Church," consists of case studies written by cultural insiders demonstrating how Asianization is practiced in evangelism and church formation. The case studies come from those who have ministered throughout Asia, including in Buddhist (chs. 5–6), Hindu (chs. 7–8), Muslim (chs. 9–11), and animistic contexts (ch. 12).

Section 3, "Training and Discipleship," consists of case studies related to the discipleship of Christians. These case studies demonstrate Asianization in action from mission contexts as diverse as churches in mainland China (ch. 14) or the Dayak of Kalimantan, Indonesia (ch. 17). Finally, James concludes the book by summarizing his call for Asianization and offering an eight-point model for missions practice in Asia via Asianization.

Though the contributors come from many different backgrounds, several prominent themes repeat through their stories of contextualization, including the prominence of community and family, the

necessity for patience and years of listening and understanding in missions practice, and the importance of allowing Asians to encounter the gospel through actions as much, if not more than, words. As a missionary with almost two decades of experience, I learned the extent to which Asian cultures differ from Western assumptions and the challenge these differences place on those who minister in Asia.

The strength of the book's argument comes not only from the diversity of case studies but also from the expertise of the contributors. Many of the contributors are pastors and missionaries who are cultural insiders. It is one thing to read theory about contextualization but quite another to read about common missionary mistakes made in reaching the majority Bhama Buddhist population in Myanmar by Peter Thein Nyunt, a former Buddhist monk (ch. 4). Insider perspectives like these give the case studies an added authoritative weight.

The book's biggest shortcoming is the absence of conversation around the dynamic impact of globalization and urbanization on Asian cultures. Throughout Asia, populations continue to migrate from rural villages to large megalopolises. The effect of this migration, especially among younger generations, has resulted in shifts towards more Western secularity and individuality that have challenged traditional Asian cultural assumptions. Save one chapter on training the Filipino diaspora in Singapore, the rest of the book primarily dealt with case studies in traditional rural areas in Asia. However, more of the current population in Asia lives in cosmopolitan megalopolises like Shanghai, Jakarta, or Bangalore than in villages. The book would have been much improved by including case studies of Asianization from ministry practitioners in locations like these that, it could be argued, are increasingly becoming "de-Asianized." Those looking for missiological advice in these contexts may find this book less helpful.

The Asianization of Christianity is recommended for missionaries and ministry practitioners interested in reaching some of the most unreached people in Asia, whether in local contexts or diaspora ministry. This book provides training material for missionaries who serve or plan to serve in non-urban Asian contexts. The case studies would also be beneficial as individual examples for seminary courses on missions and contextualization. The perspectives given and the argument for Asianizing the gospel will help advance missions practice and give missionaries a deeper understanding of the mindset of those they desire to reach.

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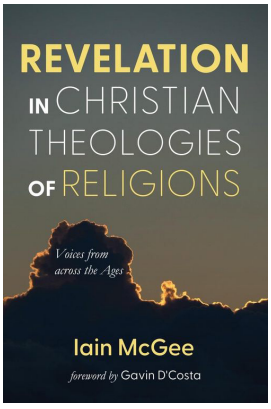
Iain McGee. *Revelation in Christian Theologies of Religions: Voices from Across the Ages*. Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2024. 485 pp. £37.00/$47.00.



Books that spring out of dissertations vary heavily in qualitay. The necessities of the doctoral writing process often require needless digressions, repetitions, and literature surveys to appease (typically well-meaning) advisors. Thus, many such books are less useful and require commitment to persevere through their reading. Fortunately, *Revelation in Christian Theologies of Religions* is different from many dissertations-turned-books. As a work of historical theology tracing how major theologians have thought through Scripture and its discussion of non-Christian religions, it benefits from Iain McGee's extensive survey of primary and secondary sources. Moreover, the author is not overly repetitive and takes few tangents. For these reasons, this book is a helpful entrance if one is thinking through a theology of religions, especially from a Reformed perspective.

McGee wrote *Revelation* to address the lack of Evangelical theological writings on religion. He surveys five theologians: John Calvin, Jonathan Edwards, and Daniel Strange (whom he terms "Reformed Evangelicals"), along with Justin Martyr and Augustine, who are embraced by the tradition (p. 1). Rather than emphasizing soteriological debates, he examines how non-Christian religions relate to divine revelation, using three key *loci*: *Logos* revelation in the Johannine prologue, the *prisca theologia* tradition (i.e., external religious ideas borrowed from Jewish and Christian sources), and the role of a theology of the demonic in revelation (p. 7).

McGee begins with Justin Martyr, whose *Logos* Christology frames revelation beyond Scripture (p. 23). Martyr believes demons could convey truth while also distorting it (pp. 27–29). McGee criticizes attempts to subsume Martyr's *prisca theologia* under his *Logos* concept (pp. 31–50), while clarifying his controversial claim that Socrates was a Christian (p. 41).

Augustine presents tension between demonology and divine sovereignty, viewing demons as fallen angels but minimizing their influence in light of God's control (pp. 58, 61). While not a major proponent of *prisca theologia*, he acknowledges its influence (pp. 63–69). He argues that unbelievers can perceive God in creation, but this does not lead to worship. Thus, even when allowing limited metaphysical truths, it provides little ethical awareness (pp. 70, 88).

Calvin, like Augustine, downplays demons' role in non-Christian religions, placing responsibility on their adherents (p. 97). Though familiar with *prisca theologia*, McGee argues he ultimately rejected it (pp. 106–9). Calvin contributes more significantly to *Logos* revelation, distinguishing the knowability of Christ's role in creation and restoration (p. 110) and developing ideas like the "seed of religion" (p. 112) and the *sensus divinitatis* (pp. 115–20).

McGee highlights Edwards's relatively uncritical use of *prisca theologia* (p. 124), likely influenced by his opposition to deism. He then describes Edwards's understanding of the demonic, whereby demons primarily deceived through playing on "human imagination" (p. 135). In this way, he follows Augustine and Calvin in preventing humanity's culpability from being mitigated. McGee believed that Edwards saw creation as "peculiarly an activity and revelation of the Son" (p. 154), with redemption allowing for the renewal of those God-endowed spiritual faculties which were lost at the Fall (pp. 144–50).

McGee includes Daniel Strange since he is one of the few Reformed Evangelical authors to do dedicated work in the theology of religions. Influenced by H. Kraemer and J. H. Bavinck, Strange thinks demons can "reveal," but that this does not actually allow for truth in false religions (p. 171). This is largely justified by following Cornelius Van Til and his use of a coherence theory of truth (p. 189). He refines *prisca theologia* by distinguishing "Remnantal" (pre-Abrahamic tradition) from "Influential" (post-Abrahamic influence) revelation (p. 171). He asserts that the Son is involved in general revelation, though general revelation itself is not of him (p. 175). The book concludes with a comparative analysis of the five theologians.

McGee's presentation has many strengths. It provides expansive surveys of secondary literature without avoiding primary sources. Though historical, his work is not content with simply restating past scholars' views. He directs the reader's attention to areas of dispute, making his own arguments where appropriate. Moreover, *Revelation* provides astute and humble historical exegesis. He contextualizes the theologians effectively without excessive background information and avoids speculative interpretations. His revelatory methodology also keeps the work focused, preventing it from being sidetracked by external theological debates, such as universalism, inclusivism, and exclusivism. Since the Reformed tradition exhibits greater diversity in its views on non-Christian religions' relation to revelation than to salvation, this approach allows for a unique and varied discussion.

As a good work, the flaws in the book are few and small. First, *Revelation*'s chapter on Strange differs from the others, as it spends significant time discussing Bavinck. At times, the chapter would have greater cohesion if the Dutch Calvinist thinker had been the primary focus. Second, some terminological distinctions would have been helpful, as terms like "logos revelation" and "natural law" (p. 118) are used in different ways, even among the tradition he is investigating. Last, additional nuance on distinctions such as eternal law versus natural law, self-revelation versus revelation of knowledge, and inspiration of people versus inspiration of Scripture might have been beneficial. McGee can hardly be faulted, however, as these would likely add considerable length to the book.

The only real limitation to the usefulness of this book is related to its audience. McGee's clear writing style starkly contrasts with the discussion's complexity. He assumes broad felicity with theological concepts and basic knowledge of historical theology, which would likely require some theological education. However, McGee's work is significant if one is a scholar or, perhaps, a seminary student with a general understanding of the Reformed tradition and the larger debates contained therein. With few difficulties and a myriad of helpful characteristics, *Revelation in Christian Theologies of Religions* is a notable success in converting a dissertation into a published manuscript.

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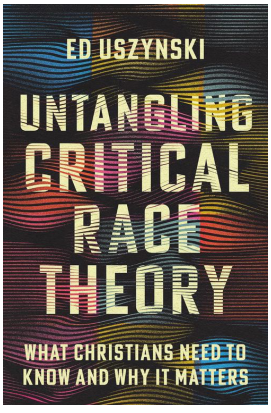
Ed Uszynski. *Untangling Critical Race Theory: What Christians Need to Know and Why It Matters*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2024. 266 pp. £18.99/$22.00.



Untangling Critical Race Theory: What Christians Need to Know and Why It Matters is a much-needed addition to the growing field of Christian scholarship on Critical Theory (CT), Critical Race Theory (CRT), social justice, and "wokeness." *Untangling* uses an academic approach unalloyed with a culture war agenda and, as such, is a primer on nuanced contextualized thinking and not a book for people seeking simple answers. In scope and structure, Uszynski's book is most similar to Neil Shenvi and Pat Sawyer's *Critical Dilemma: The Rise of Critical Theories and Social Justice Ideology—Implications for the Church and Society*; but in tone and disposition, his writing aligns more closely with Robert Chao Romero and Jeff M. Liou's *Christianity and Critical Race Theory: A Faithful and Constructive Conversation*, and the various articles by Nathan Luis Cartegena. Uszynski rejects both the alarmist approach of such authors as Voddie T. Baucham, Jon Harris, and Owen Strachan, and the apologetics approach of Shenvi and Sawyer.

Uszynski's approach grows from his years of cross-cultural ministry with Cru, his Trinity Evangelical Divinity School degrees, his PhD in American Culture Studies, and his interracial discipleship journey. Two premises frame the book's narrative, which he says is specifically written for white evangelicals. The first is that despite sharing "familial characteristics," Marxism, CT, and CRT are different theoretical frameworks that arose at different times to serve different purposes, and to critique them properly, we must first understand them. Uszynski chronologically outlines the historical moments that birthed each framework and explains the "why" behind their basic animating questions, setting his work apart from other authors who merely trace connections between ideas or blur the distinctions between the terms.

Second, the catalyzing moment for Uszynski's thought on this subject came while reading Carl Henry's 1947 classic, *The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism*. As noted by Uszynski, Henry asserted that "Social justice is not … simply an appendage to the evangelical message; it is an intrinsic part of the whole, without which the preaching of the gospel itself is truncated." Furthermore, because so many churches use only individual evangelism to solve social problems, "younger evangelicals are unprepared to confront the socioeconomic crisis except through socialist ideology" (pp. 18–19). For Uszynski, the rising popularity of CT/CRT is the result of white evangelicalism not taking Henry's warning to heart.

Uszynski explains that when CT/CRT scholars study how power is used and abused, to what ends, and by whom, they are asking the materialist's version of Solomon's guiding question in Ecclesiastes: "How do we make sense of life under the sun apart from God?" CRT asks "how race and power conspire to create structures and patterns that affect real lives" (p. 118). Their subject makes them natural allies with the disenfranchised and marginalized and leads them to take structural sin seriously, so their work functions as "an analysis of how sin works through the logic and processes of Capitalism and Conservatism" (p. 62). Uszynski's use of "sin" is awkward since Marxists do not believe in sin or use the term. Still, by using this word, he is signaling that a robust doctrine of structural and systemic sin would

lead a Christian to understand that this is, in fact, what Marxist-informed scholars are studying without realizing it.

In a professorial manner, Uszynski methodically unpacks the nuances of commonly mispresented concepts such as the social construction of race, wokeness, racism, intersectionality, white privilege, objectivity, white supremacy, whiteness, and social justice. He draws important distinctions between a theory and a worldview (denying that CRT alone is a worldview), explains the importance of Christians embracing both personal responsibility and systemic understandings of sin, and tackles such delicate topics as confessing corporate sin and explaining whether white people should apologize for being white. He strongly rebukes Christians' rush to judgment of fellow believers who use specific terms without seeking to understand them or considering their context.

Uszynski argues that a Christian can learn from the analysis of CT/CRT scholars without feeling obligated to accept their radical progressive political solutions because identifying a problem and solving it are not the same thing. His overriding concern is that when evangelicals demonize CRT, they are ignoring the lived reality CRT is identifying and creating a theological lacuna that incentivizes people to either turn to radical politics or to various unorthodox liberation theologies (which he deems heretical). Where the social gospel and liberation theologies have flourished, he maintains, "Christians either failed to respond or responded so slowly to the plight of the marginalized, dispossessed, and neglected, that eventually someone felt the need to overcorrect" (p. 209). Hence, "the greatest threat to the strength of the church isn't secular ideology; it's the vacuum created by our own indifference toward social evil the Bible plainly condemns" and that CT/CRT exposes (p. 216).

Uszynski thinks Christians "shouldn't need CRT" (p. 158) but astutely realizes that "We can know our Bible without ever having thought about why all the black kids sit together in the cafeteria" (p. 197). So he allows that "If your current reading of the Bible allows you to see how sin can become systematized and woven into social structures in an unrighteous and unjust way, then you don't need CRT" (p. 160). This emphasis on structural and systemic sin aligns him with Romero and Lieu and distances him from Shenvi and Sawyer.

Besides the lack of an index, this reviewer was disappointed that Uszynski seems to confuse power and authority (pp. 70–74) and references ethnicity as "God-given" (unlike race) (pp. 97, 199), although it is also socially constructed. Arguably, Uszynski's most controversial point is his assertion that people can accept the analysis of CRT but ignore the closely related critical theories about sex and gender. Although he asserts there is no reason we must accept them as a package, he neither acknowledges nor refutes the claims of many CRT and CRT-proximate scholars who emphatically argue for the interconnectedness of CRT with all other forms of oppression. He is clearly frustrated with evangelicals who view things differently than he does, and this occasionally manifests in a scolding or condescending tone toward his fellow white evangelicals. One such example is when he accuses them of embracing "near-hysterical" reactions to "any hint of what they call the oppressor/oppressed paradigm" (p. 176). A further friction point for some readers will be that he challenges evangelicals not to worry about embracing the terminology of CRT as long as their motivations stem from a proper reading of Scripture. However, his failure to employ his theological training to exegete illustrative Bible passages was a missed opportunity.

Ultimately, Uszynski's point is that forward movement on the racial challenges facing evangelicals will only come from thoughtful, honest, biblical teaching about all forms of sin, and CRT can help

white evangelicals better understand forms of systemic and structural sin they would otherwise tend to overlook. The perspectives in this book can be a gift to white evangelicals … if they will receive them.

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